

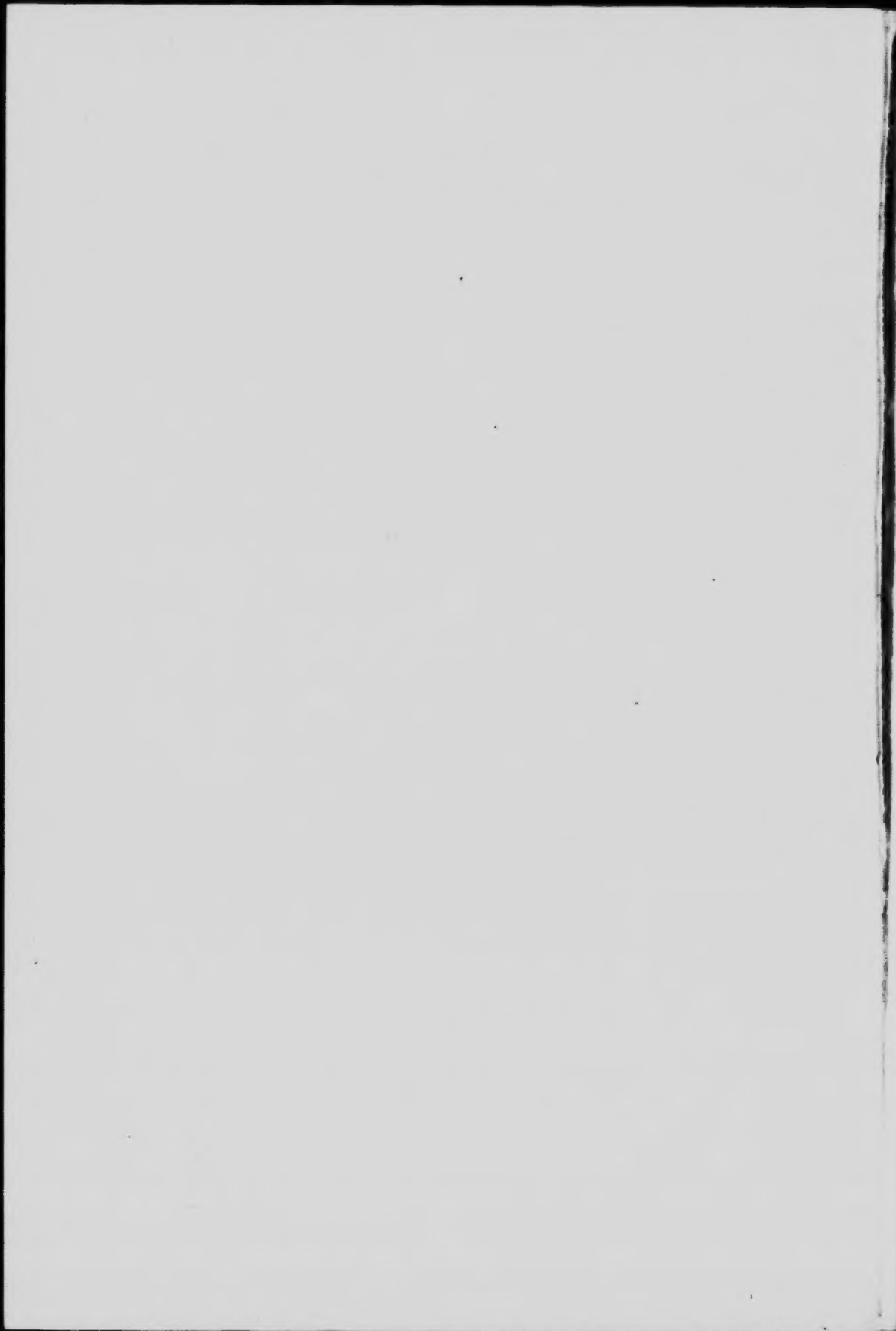


PRINCESS
ZARA
ROSS BEECKMAN

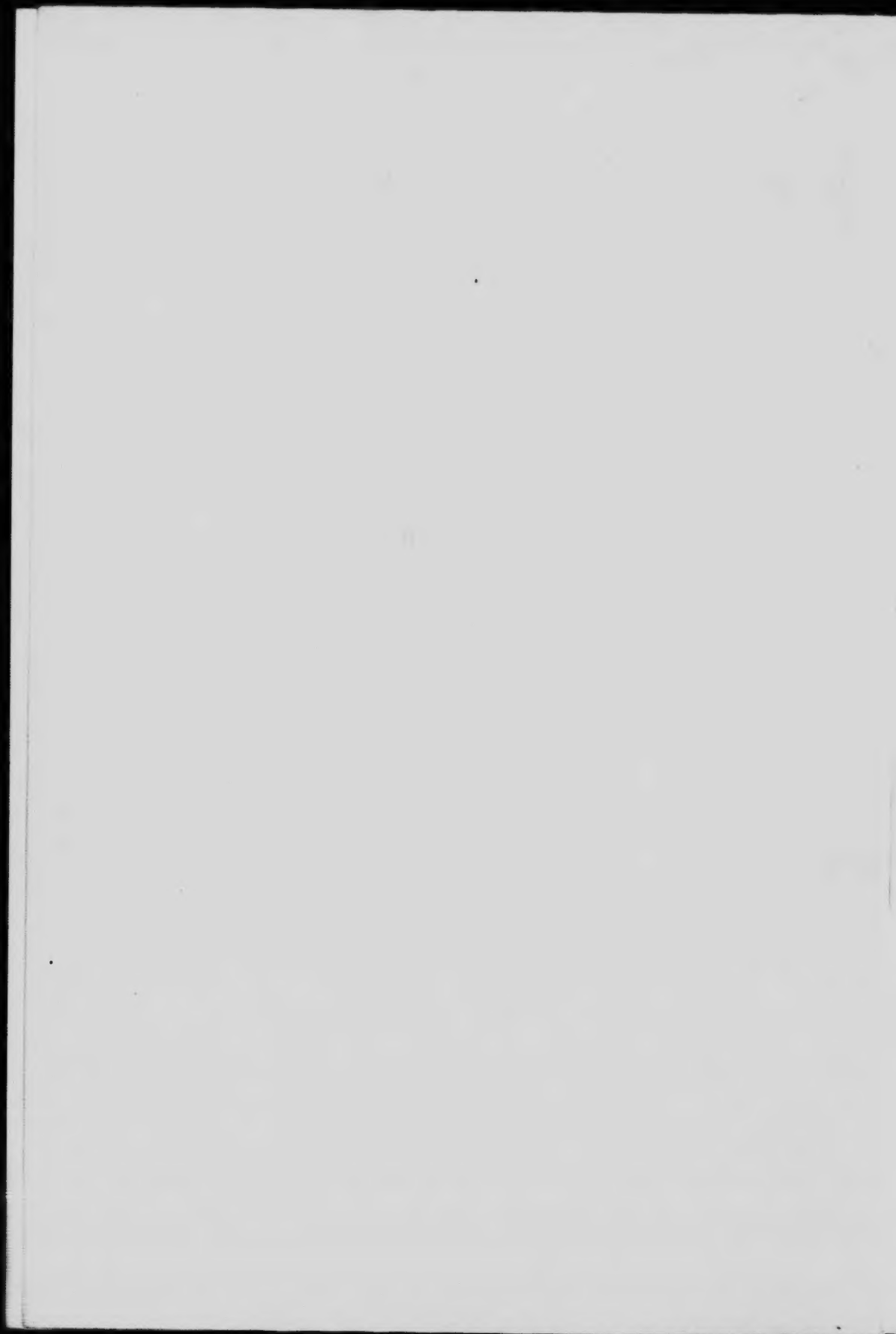
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PRINCESS ZARA





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BY
ROSS BEECKMAN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
BERT KNIGHT



TORONTO
McLEOD & ALLEN
PUBLISHERS



WILLIAMS
1908

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THE THEME

*Two shall be born the whole wide world apart;
And speak in different tongues, and have no
thought*

*Each of the other's being, and no heed;
And these o'er unknown seas to unknown lands
Shall cross, escaping wreck, defying death,
And all unconsciously shape every act
And lend each wandering step to this one end,—
That, one day, out of darkness, they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes.*

SUSAN MARR SPALDING.

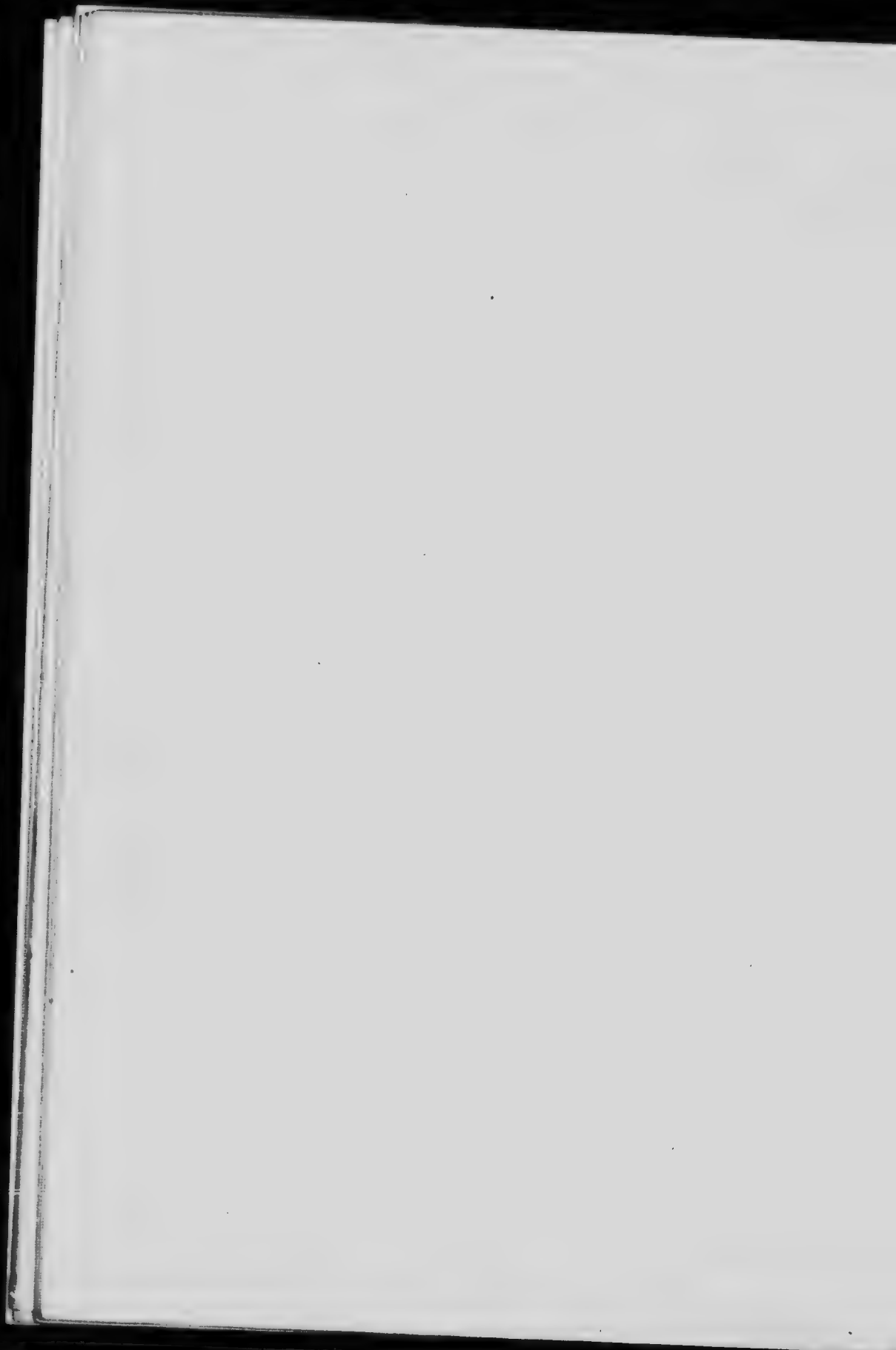


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PRINCESS ZARA



PRINCESS ZARA

CHAPTER I

A LADY OF QUALITY

THE steamship Trave of the North German Lloyd docked at its Hoboken pier at eight o'clock one morning in December. Among the passengers who presently departed from the vessel was a woman who attracted unusual attention for the reason that she was accompanied by a considerable suite of retainers and servants who were for a time as busy as flies around a honey pot, caring for their mistress' baggage, and otherwise attending to the details of her arrival. Nor was it alone for this reason that all eyes were from time to time turned in her direction. There was about her a certain air of distinction, wealth, power and repose, which impressed itself upon the observers. Many there were who sought eagerly an opportunity to scan the features of this young woman's face, for that she was

PRINCESS ZARA

young, was immediately apparent, and the fact added not a little to the interest that was manifested in her.

The young woman, whoever she was, maintained an air of reserve which raised a barrier beyond which none of the curious might penetrate; and as if insolently disdainful of the attention she attracted, her face remained veiled; not too thickly, but effectively enough to set at naught these efforts of the curious throng.

A view of her face was, however, not required to determine in the minds of the beholders that she possessed more than ordinarily, the attractive feminine qualities. Her very presence told that; the air with which she moved about among her servitors; the simple gestures she made in giving her directions, and the quiet but resourceful and effective methods she used in administering her affairs, indicated that not only was she a person of great wealth, but that she was also high in place and in authority, and one who was accustomed to being obeyed.

Her costume was hidden entirely beneath the magnificent furs which enveloped her, and even the maid who attended upon her immediate wants was more

A LADY OF QUALITY

elaborately gowned and wrapped than the average feminine personage of the western world is wont to be.

The immediate party of this distinguished passenger soon took its departure from the pier, leaving behind only those whose various duties consisted in caring for the seventy-odd pieces of baggage soon to be taken from the hold of the vessel; and this immediate party departed from the pier in carriages, for the hotel where accommodations had already been secured. The young woman and her maid occupied a conveyance by themselves; other maids followed in a second one, and a third contained two footmen, a courier and her official messenger.

At the hotel, where notice of her arrival in the city had been received, she was assigned to a suite of rooms which occupied the greater part of one entire floor and which included every convenience which the most illustrious personage travelling in the United States could have required, or would have found it possible to obtain.

The courier at once sought the hotel office and registered as follows:

PRINCESS ZARA

Her Highness Princess Zara de Echeveria
and suite, St. Petersburg.

And when his attention was called to the fact that the names of the entire party were required, he shrugged his shoulders and announced:

"I regret, sir, that I do not remember the names of all the persons who comprise her highness' suite, but I will supply you presently with a list of them."

In the parlor of the apartments occupied by the princess, her maid was removing the furs and wraps and making her mistress comfortable, for there is inevitably after a sea voyage, a few hours of fatigue which nothing but restful quiet and utter idleness will overcome; and therefore an hour or more later, when a visiting card was taken to the princess she did not even give herself the trouble to examine it, but said while she peered through half closed eyelids:

"Whoever it is, Orloff, say that I will not receive until four this afternoon."

Down below, in the office of the hotel, the gentleman who had sent up the card and who received this message in reply to it, shrugged his shoulders, glanced at the face of his watch to discover that it

A LADY OF QUALITY

was yet barely noon-time, crossed to the book stall where he secured something to read and thereby while away the time, and then having sought a comfortable chair in a secluded corner deposited himself in it with an air of finality which indicated that he had no idea of departing from the hotel until after he had secured the solicited audience.

At four he sent a second card to the princess; at half past four he was admitted to her presence.

If the eyes of that curious throng of people who had watched her arrival at the steamship pier could have seen her then, when this man who had waited so long was shown into her presence, they would have been amply repaid for their admiring curiosity concerning her. It is trite to speak of a woman as being radiantly beautiful, commonplace to refer to it at all, save by implication, since feminine beauty is a composite attribute, vague and indefinable, and should possess no single quality to individualize it. Beauty such as that possessed by Princess Zara can neither be defined nor described. It is the *tout ensemble* of her presence and her personal charm.

Zara de Echeveria needed no adornment to em-

PRINCESS ZARA

phasize the attractions of her gorgeous self. She was one of those rare women who are rendered more attractive by the absence of all ornament and her dark eyes were more luminous and brilliant than any jewel she might have worn. Her gown, though rich, was simplicity itself, and inasmuch as her servants had found time during the hours since their arrival, to decorate the rooms according to the princess' tastes, she was surrounded by much the same settings that would have been contained in her own palatial home at St. Petersburg. When it is said that she was barely twenty-five in years; that her father had been a Spanish nobleman in the diplomatic service at the Russian capital, and that her mother was of royal birth, we have an explanation for the exquisitely fascinating and almost voluptuous qualities of her beauty, as well as for her royal manner of command.

She did not leave her chair when this man was taken into her presence, but extended one small and perfectly formed hand upon which gleamed a solitary ring; the only jewel she wore that afternoon save a small pin in the lace at her throat, which was

A LADY OF QUALITY

fashioned precisely after the same pattern as the ring.

The man lost no time in raising that beautiful hand to his lips, and he bowed low over it, with a courtly grace as distinguished in its gesture, as was her reception of him. One wondered why such a man as this had been contented to endure five idle hours of waiting upon her serene pleasure; and yet if one had looked past him to her, one might have ceased to wonder, and have thought a lifetime of waiting would be as nothing, if possession of her at the end of it could be its reward.

"It was kind of you to come to me so quickly after my arrival," she said to him in a low voice that was perfectly modulated.

"It was kinder of you to receive me, princess," he responded, stepping back again to the center of the room and standing tall and straight before her in his commanding manhood. He was a handsome man, past fifty, distinguished, and like the princess he greeted, had about him the unquestionable air of authority.

PRINCESS ZARA

"I am afraid I kept you waiting."

"One does not consider moments of waiting, if Princess Zara be the object of it," he retorted, smiling.

"Won't you be seated?"

"Thank you; yes."

He drew a chair forward so that they sat nearly facing each other across a low table upon which many of the princess' personal effects had already been arranged. Among them was a box of Russian cigarettes which she now indicated by a gesture, while with a smile which lighted her face wonderfully and gave to it that added charm that is indescribable, she said:

"There are some of your favorite cigarettes, Saberevski. I had you in mind when I included them among my personal baggage, having no doubt that I should encounter you when I should arrive in this country; but little thinking that you would be the first to greet me. You will pardon me for not indulging in one of them myself, for you know that I have never acquired the habit. Nevertheless they will perhaps suggest to you the flavor of home, and

A LADY OF QUALITY

may transport you for a moment to the scenes which I know you are longing for."

"Thank you, princess," he replied, and lighted one. Then he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and for a time there was utter silence between these two. The man seemed indeed to have been transported in thought, to his native environment, not so much by the odor and flavor of the cigarette he puffed with such calm enjoyment, as by the presence of this magnificent creature who confronted him so daintily, and who received him so simply and yet so grandly. "You knew, then, that I was here in New York, princess?" he asked of her presently, peering at her through the smoke he was making; and he smiled comfortably across the distance that separated them.

"I knew you were in America, Saberevski; and to me America means New York. I believed that you would not be long in making yourself known to me after my arrival, for I knew that the papers would announce it, and that your — shall I call it your duties? — would require that you should not permit my presence here to pass unnoticed."

PRINCESS ZARA

The man shrugged his shoulders, indulging himself in another smile as he replied:

"It is hardly kind of you to attribute this call to duty on my part. When I am in your presence I find myself wishing that there were no such things as duties to be performed. When I look at you, Zara, I wish that I were young again, and that I might throw duty to the winds and enter the list against all others who seek you."

An expression of annoyance, as fleeting as it was certain, came into her eyes, and she replied with a little show of impatience:

"Spare me that sort of thing, Saberevski. One does not always wish to hear such expressions as that; and coming from you, addressed to me, they are not pleasant."

"Not even when you know them to be sincere, Zara? I spoke in the past tense, and only of what might have been were the disparity of our years less, and if the environment by which we are respectively surrounded could have been different."

"In other words," she smiled back at him, now recovered from her impatience, "if the world had

A LADY OF QUALITY

been created a different one, and if we were not ourselves; as we are."

"Precisely," he replied, and laughed.

"I did not even look at your card when it was brought to me," she said, with an abrupt change of the subject; "had I done so I would not have kept you waiting so long. Tell me something about yourself, Saberevski; and why it is that you have deemed it wise, or perhaps necessary to become an expatriate, and to deprive St. Petersburg and all who are there, of your presence and your wise counsels."

"I am afraid it is too long a story and hardly worth the telling at that. St. Petersburg has tired of me. I am better away from it, and it is much better with me away; believe me."

"And his majesty, the czar? Is he also of that opinion, my friend?"

"His majesty, the czar, does me the honor, princess, to approve of my present plans and conduct," replied Saberevski with slow and low toned emphasis.

CHAPTER II

A WARNING

ALEXIS SABEREVSKI leaned forward in his chair to secure another of the cigarettes, and having lighted it with studied deliberation, resumed his former position gazing between half closed eyelids toward Princess Zara. It was quite evident that he had gone to her with a distinct purpose in view which he meant to fulfill before his departure; and it was plain to be seen that Zara appreciated the fact. While he was silent, she waited, but with a half smile upon her beautiful face, that was quizzical and somewhat whimsical, as if in her secret heart she was aware of the purpose of his errand but for reasons of her own did not wish to anticipate it. And he read her correctly, too. He believed that she understood him even better than he knew her; but viewed from his own standpoint he

A WARNING

had a duty to perform in regard to her, and he had gone there to fulfill it.

"Zara," he said, "when I saw the announcement of your intended visit to this country —"

"Pardon me, Saberevski," she interrupted him; "but did the knowledge of my expected visit come to you through a printed announcement, or were you informed of it even before the printers had set the type?"

"I see that I must be quite frank with you," he laughed.

"Between friends frankness is always best," she retorted.

"In that case I will begin again, princess."

"It would be better — and wiser."

"When I was informed of your anticipated visit to this country I decided that I would be the first to welcome you here, and in making that decision I had a double purpose."

"Yes."

"One of them only, need interest us at this moment, and that is purely a personal one. You know,

PRINCESS ZARA

Zara, how I have always regarded you, and how I do so now. Your father was my best friend; your mother — it is perhaps unnecessary that I should be more explicit regarding her."

"Yes, Saberevski," said Zara in a low tone. "I know that you loved my mother, and that all your life you have remained true to your adoration of her, even though she never returned it; but go on."

"I love you, Zara, more perhaps than I admit to myself; more profoundly than it would be wise for me to tell you, or agreeable for you to hear; but in the admiration and esteem I feel for you, there is included no sentiment which could offend you."

"I know that, my friend."

"I would like to talk with you quite openly for once, Zara, in order that you may comprehend perfectly where I stand, and because I do not wish you to misconstrue any assertion I shall make, or to attribute to any one of them, another motive than I intend."

"I think you may be assured of that."

"You guessed correctly a moment ago, about my receiving intelligence concerning your visit here, be-

A WARNING

fore the composers set the type of the announcement; but the intelligence was incorporated among other things that were conveyed to me in the same manner, and by the same message. It had no direct significance, and beyond the mere statement of the fact, there was no comment. I was not directed to call upon you, and in fact there was no suggestion made that bore directly upon your presence here. But, Zara, the mere statement of your intention conveyed to me very many suggestions which I have come here to-day to make known to you. I believe it to be my clear duty to do so."

"Well, my friend?"

"You know who and what I have been, and am. Always close to the person of the czar; for very many years deeply in his confidence, and possessing I believe his friendship to an extraordinary degree, it has been my pleasure as well as my duty to serve my emperor in many secret ways which our little world at St. Petersburg does not know or appreciate. The fact that I am at present an expatriate, as you have so aptly stated, is due to reasons which I need not explain, and which do not concern me just now. The

PRINCESS ZARA

fact that I am one, has stationed me in New York by choice, and not by direction; but I thank God that I am here to greet you upon your arrival because I hope by very plain speaking to change a course you have determined upon, and to induce you —"

"Wait one moment, Saberevski. Don't you think that you are getting rather beyond your depth? I appreciate all that you are trying so vainly to tell me. I know of your personal interest in me, and I honor you and thank you for it. But it is not like Alexis Saberevski to hesitate over a statement he has decided to make, and if I am not mistaken you began this discourse with a determination to be frank. Might I suggest that you make yourself more plain?"

"I have been called a diplomat of the first order, Zara," he replied, with a smile, "but your straightforward methods, and my resolute purpose, make my course of procedure somewhat difficult. I will, however, be entirely frank."

"That is better."

"Zara de Echeveria, Alexis Saberevski informs you now that he knows you to be high in the councils of the nihilists."

A WARNING

Was there a suggestion of pallor for an instant upon the countenance of the princess? Was there a quick but imperceptible intaking of her breath? Was there a deepening in the expression of her matchless eyes, and an imperceptible widening of them, as they dwelt upon her companion? Was there a stiffening of her figure in its attitude of quiet repose, and did her muscles attain a sudden rigidity, induced by that startling announcement? Saberevski could not have answered any one of these questions. So perfectly were the features and the facial expression of Princess Zara under her control that she outwardly betrayed no sign of the effect of the announcement. And yet it might well have affected her most deeply; might have startled her even into a cry of terror; should have filled her with instant fear, because this man who made it was one, who in his former official capacity could have condemned almost any person in Russia to exile by a gesture, or a word. And Zara did not doubt that his official capacity still obtained. She knew him to be an expatriate as she had announced. She understood that for some reason, not apparent, he had become a

PRINCESS ZARA

voluntary exile from his native country and city, and might never again return to the scenes he loved best. But she also knew that he was no less closely in the confidence of the Russian emperor, and could never be any the less inimical to the enemies of the czar. A statement such as he had made, coming from him, charging her with complicity in revolutionary acts which had for their object the assassination of the Russian ruler and his possible successors, contained an implied threat more terrible in its consequences than any other one which could have been made; more terrible to her, personally, than to any other person against whom it might have been made, because she knew by the experiences of one of her girl friends, to what extremities of mental and moral torture a Siberian exile may be condemned.

She made no reply. She remained perfectly motionless and silent, waiting for him to continue.

"You need not deny me, Zara, for I know," he went on presently. "How the knowledge came to me does not matter, and has no connection with this interview. But I know. That knowledge has created the duty which I have come to you to-day to

A WARNING

perform. I want you to abandon your present pursuits. Whatever the purpose of your visit to America may be, I beg that you will forego it. I do not seek any confession, or even a statement from you, upon this subject. Indeed I should prefer that you make none. You cannot please me better than by listening to me in silence, so that when I leave you presently, you will know and I will know, that I will have no more knowledge concerning you and your entanglements with those people, than I possessed before I came. I would have it that way. I would have it no other way."

She nodded her head, gazing at him intently, but with that same changeless expression of impersonal interest, as if she were listening to the discussion of a third party who was not known to her save by name.

"Zara," he continued, "you will receive other cards than mine to-day, and you should know that every man or woman who will call upon you in behalf of the nihilists, is marked and known. You cannot engage in the business that brought you here, and afterward return to Russia in safety. The

PRINCESS ZARA

secret police of our empire extends all over the world, and is as efficient in the city of New York, as it is in Moscow or St. Petersburg, so far as its requirements demand. I warn you, not in behalf of your party, the principals of which I despise and abhor; not in behalf of any individual member of that revolutionist sect, but wholly in behalf of Zara de Echeveria, the daughter of my best friend, the offspring of the only woman I ever loved. To-day while I talk to you, I am not Alexis Saberevski the friend of the czar, but I am Alexis Saberevski *your* friend. I have stepped outside my duty; I have taken it upon myself to come here to perform what may be a disloyal act to my emperor, in order to warn you against a course which can have but one end, and which can bring you to but one fate — Siberia."

He left his chair and stood beside her. He reached down and took one of her hands, pressing it between the palms of both his own.

"Zara," he said, with deep-toned feeling, "in some ways you are like a daughter to me; in others you are the reincarnation of the woman I loved so dearly. I love you for yourself, and for the sake of those two

A WARNING

who gave you life. I shall never plead with you again. My duty will probably nevermore call me into your presence. When we part this day, it is likely to be for the last time. If danger befalls you because of the conditions you create through this entanglement, I cannot go to your rescue, or even to your assistance. I speak to you as with a voice from the grave, beseeching you in the names of your father and mother, to heed what I have said."

"You have forgotten —" She began impetuously to answer, but he unclasped one hand from hers, long enough to make a warning gesture, and enunciated the one word: "Hush! Remember, Zara, you are not to speak until I have finished, and then upon a different subject. But I will answer your unspoken thought, for I read it in your manner. I have not forgotten your little friend Yvonne; nor Stanislaus, her brother. Indeed, my child, this very scene reminds me of it, and renders all the more imperative the duty I am seeking to perform. Let the terrible fate of that poor girl appeal to you. Let the awful end of Stanislaus be a warning. Vengeance should have no part or place in your heart, even though

PRINCESS ZARA

you believe that they cry out to you from their graves to undertake it. But they do not do that, Zara, and if either or both of them could speak now, they would voice the sentiments I have expressed, and emphasize the warnings I have given. Go back to your home in St. Petersburg, my child, and leave politics alone. Alexander, the czar, admires you and esteems you, but I who am his friend, warn you that the admiration and esteem of monarchs can be no more relied upon than the shifting fogs of the Gulf of Finland."

Again Princess Zara would have spoken, for her dark eyes lighted with a sudden fire and she half started from her chair with an eagerness that was impetuously expressive. But Saberevski retained his clasp upon her hands, and without seeming to do so, restrained her where she was; after a moment he added:

"Now, if you please we will change the subject. My duty as I saw it, has been performed, and nothing remains to be said. In a few moments I will leave you, and when I do so, we will probably part for the

A WARNING

last time. Now, Zara, tell me something about yourself."

There was a suspicion of tears in her upturned eyes as she looked at him from out of their glowing depths, but she took him at his word, and with a visible effort brought back the smile to her countenance as he returned to his chair at the opposite side of the table.

"There is little to tell you of myself, Saberevski," she replied, while he helped himself to another cigarette. "You know what my life is, even though you have been absent from home almost a year."

"Yes," he said, smiling, "one round of pleasures, and of conquest. Adorers waiting for you on every hand; lovers perhaps —"

"No; not lovers," she interrupted him. "There is no place for them, Saberevski," and a shade of sadness which he attributed to the memory of Stanislaus, clouded her eyes for a moment. Had he but known however, it was no recollection of that young officer of the czar's household, to whom reference has already been made and to whom Zara was once

PRINCESS ZARA

betrothed, that affected her. It was a deeper and more far-reaching consideration that brought the expression of pain for an instant into her eyes, and she longed to cry out the truth to her companion, then and there.

Had she done so, her statement would have been something like this:

"There is no room in my heart for a lover, for the reason that the cause I have espoused fills it completely. The people whose wrongs I seek to redress, the victims whose wandering souls cry out for vengeance, and the women exiles in frozen Siberia whose fates are too terrible to relate, fill my whole heart and being so completely as to leave no room for personal love."

She would have said that, and much more, but she restrained herself; and he rose to take his departure.

She gave him both her hands, and in a low tone that was full of suppressed feeling, she said to him, at parting:

"Do not think, my friend, that I have failed to appreciate all the goodness of your motives in coming

A WARNING

to me to-day. From my heart I thank you, and if it should be as you say, that we may never meet again, although I see no reason for such a thing, I wish you to know that in parting, Zara de Echeveria admired and esteemed you above all other men of her acquaintance. Good-bye."

CHAPTER III

TWO SHALL BE BORN THE WHOLE WIDE WORLD
APART

WE need recite but one other interview which Princess Zara undertook that day. Several follow upon it, and there were many such during her stay of more than a week in New York City.

Many came, were received and went away again; and the princess herself was frequently abroad in the streets, or at places of amusement, or was entertained by those who worship at the shrine of nobility.

But there was one who called upon her the evening of the day of Saberevski's interview, to which it is necessary that we should refer. He came at ten o'clock, and was expected, for he was conducted to her presence immediately and was received without question, although it would have been immediately

TWO SHALL BE BORN THE WORLD APART

plain to an observer that these two had never met before.

The things which they discussed were largely technical, and had to do with the conduct and activities of various nihilistic agents who were scattered about over the world, outside of Russia. He was a man whose name does not appear again in this story and which therefore need not be mentioned now, but he was nevertheless one well known at the courts of Europe, and on the streets of New York and Washington.

At the end of their discussion and interchange of confidences, when he rose to leave her and she gave him her hand, he said, recurring to the subject of their conversation:

"Princess, if we had others like you, as sincere in their efforts for the betterment of our people, nihilism would soon become the dominant factor of Russian politics, and official oppression would cease to exist. If we had others like you, as good and as beautiful as you are, the czar would abdicate, or would consent to give us a parliament. As it is,

PRINCESS ZARA

the struggle has only just begun, and I greatly fear that neither I nor you, young though you are, will live to see its end."

"Thank you," she said. "I understand thoroughly what you mean. It is true that I am heart and soul in this movement. It is equally true that I am prepared to devote my fortune and my life to an attainment of the ends we seek."

"Are you an extremist?" he asked her. "We have not touched upon that part of the subject as yet, princess."

She hesitated.

"If you mean by that expression, do I seek the life of Alexander? I could answer you in the affirmative without hesitation; but I would have to confess that my desire for vengeance upon him is more of a personal quality, than of a political character. I am mindful of the fact that we cannot destroy a tree by lopping off one of its branches, and whenever a czar is dead, another lives to take his place and to permit the injustices practiced in his name, to continue. He is like the hydra-headed monster of child-

TWO SHALL BE BORN THE WORLD APART

hood's tales, and another head grows as fast as one may be cut off."

"You are a beautiful woman, princess, and with that aid alone you should accomplish much."

"Yes," she admitted, as calmly as if he had referred to a ring she wore on her hand; "but I find that to be the most unpleasant character of my employment. To use such beauty as I have, and such attractions as I possess, for the winning of men to our cause, whether they be officials or nobles, is hateful to me; and yet I do not hesitate."

"It is not a difficult task for men to join the nihilists because of love for you; I could, myself, almost forsake it, did you ask such a sacrifice."

"Shame on you!" she stormed at him, snatching away her hand and darting out of his reach. "Shame on you for that! Those were treacherous words, and I expected them least of all, from you. You make me ashamed; ashamed for you, and for the cause I uphold. Are all men so weak, and so easily led? Does the mere beauty of a woman make cowards of them all? Could a pair of flashing eyes,

PRINCESS ZARA

or the touch of soft hands, change the destinies of an empire? "

" They have done so more than once, princess."

" You make me hate myself — and you."

" I am afraid that you took me too literally," he said, with perfect composure, for although he knew that he had angered her, she was yet so beautiful in her impetuous resentment of his words that he was lost in admiration. Indeed he had uttered no more than the truth when he told her that he might even forsake the cause if such a woman as Zara could have been his reward; and he knew by long years of experience, that he uttered the sentiments of nine men out of ten who might fall under her influence.

" My mission is accomplished here," she told him, " and already my passage is engaged for the return voyage. I leave New York at once and I shall probably never return to it. What you have told me of the measures taken in our behalf, has encouraged me greatly; and yet because of one thing you have said, I dread the return to St. Petersburg."

" What was that, princess? "

TWO SHALL BE BORN THE WORLD APART

"I must correct myself. You intimated it; you did not say it."

"What was it?"

"You suggested, in one statement you made, that you had reason to fear that the spy-system as arrayed against us at home, might be augmented by the addition of skilled operators and experts from this country. I had thought that we nihilists had a monopoly of that sort of employment, and that the czar and his nobles could claim only the loyalty of their own spies. But your suggestion fills me with doubt and dread. If Alexander were to introduce imported spies among our people —"

He interrupted the princess by laughing heartily.

"Again you took me too literally," he asserted. "Here and there, there may be one who will seek Russia and the czar for such employment, but it will be for the emolument it will bring, and cannot be induced by patriotic sentiment. We would have little cause to dread such people, since we would not be long in identifying them, and ultimately I believe they would assist, rather than retard our efforts."

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"Perhaps so."

"There can be no doubt of your own loyalty to our cause, princess?"

"Certainly not."

"Are the others like you? Pardon me, there can be no others like you for there could never be another so beautiful and fascinating as you are. But are there others of your acquaintance high in position, who are working for the cause as diligently as you are?"

"They are many. Their name is legion."

They parted then. He to go about his several duties among the nihilistic sympathizers who could not return to Russia without including Siberia in their itinerary, and she to stride across the room and stand for a long time facing herself in the mirror, studying the features of her own beautiful face in an effort to detect there the fascinating qualities before which all men with whom she came in contact seemed so ready to succumb.

But her eyes were cold and hard as she regarded her own reflection in the glass. There was a fire

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in their depths which could have attracted no man, and which would have repelled all alike, for it was threatening and sombre.

Zara de Echeveria almost hated herself at that moment. Hated the beauty which gave her such power, and which exerted the magic that made slaves of men.

The hour came when she entered a carriage again to be driven to the steamship wharf; when she stood upon the deck near the rail, and gazed, as she honestly believed, over the house tops of a city she would never see again.

Fate, however, had builded differently for her, although she did not guess it; and she was going now to meet it as fast as the throbbing engines of the mechanical monster could bear her forward.

When the great bulk of the vessel swung into the current of the North river, and she turned her eyes once more toward the wharf it had left, a waving hand attracted her attention, and she recognized the tall form of Alexis Saberevski as he bade her adieu. Beside him on the pier was another figure,

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as tall and as straight as Saberevski's, and she saw them turn away together and walk up the pier until they were lost in the crowd.

She did not know, then, that the other tall figure of a man was the one into whose arms she was fleeing, even though she left him there, unknown, upon that North river wharf, while she sailed away to the other side of the world.

And he could foresee as little.

But such is Fate.

CHAPTER IV.

DAN DERRINGTON'S STORY

I HAD known Alexis Saberevski in St. Petersburg; I had known him again in Paris. I had, in fact, encountered him at one time or another in almost every capital of Europe, and I was therefore not greatly surprised when, having just left the dining table at my club in my own native city, New York, his card was given to me with the information that the gentleman was waiting in the reception room.

I had him up at once, with the courtesies of the club extended to him, and finding that he had dined, we ensconced ourselves in the depths of a pair of huge chairs which occupied one of the secluded corners of the library, each equally delighted to be again in the company of the other. We had never known each other intimately, and yet we were friends; friends after that fashion which sometimes comes

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between men of pronounced characteristics, and which finds its expression in the form of a silent confidence, and an undoubted pleasure in each other's company.

I knew Saberevski to be a particularly strong man. Strong in the highest and best acceptation and meaning of that word, for he was a giant in intellect and in character.

He was also a mystery, and this fact possibly rendered him all the more interesting to one whose business it had always been to solve mysteries. I do not mean by that that I had ever made any effort to delve into the secrets of Saberevski's past, or to read without his knowledge and consent, any portion of that history which he kept so carefully veiled; but the mere fact that an air of mystery did pervade his presence, imparted to him a certain fascinating quality which might not otherwise have been apparent.

I had not encountered him for several years, and our last parting had occurred in front of Browne's hotel, Piccadilly, standing near the entrance from Albemarle street. As I received his card from the club servant, the words he had uttered at that hour

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of parting returned to me, for I had made a mental note of them, at the time regarding them as being of much more import than was nakedly expressed, coming from such a man. He had said: "I shall probably never return to St. Petersburg or pass across the border of Russia again, Derrington; but I may, and probably will some day, find myself in New York; when I do, you shall know of it." That day when I received his card, the last words he had uttered to me recurred to my mind, and it was with unmixed pleasure that I presently greeted him. I knew that there had been a time when he was high in place at the court of his native city, St. Petersburg; I knew that he had been prominent in the favor of Czar Alexander, and I had no doubt that he was so still, notwithstanding the positive assertion once made by him that he would probably never pass the borders of Russia again. But this was only another phase of the mystery that surrounded him, and it belittled not at all my estimation of the man's character, and the power he could sway if he chose to do so. How deeply he was, even at that moment, in the confidence of the Russian emperor, I was one day

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to understand, although the moment of comprehension was many months distant from me then.

He had dined and so we had cigars served to us in that cozy corner where, with a table which held a box of them, together with some liquid refreshments and other conveniences, we settled ourselves for an uninterrupted chat.

"It is good to see you, old chap," he told me in his frank and hearty way; "good to be with you again; to feel the clasp of your hand and to hear your hearty laugh. I have been thinking about you considerably of late, and this morning when I found that my wandering life had dropped me down in your city, I determined to look you up at once. In my baggage I found your card which contained this club address; and here I am." His big, hearty, infectious laugh rang through the room.

There was no need to tell him of my own delight in his presence. My manner of greeting him had demonstrated that without any question of doubt. Presently he asked me:

"What is your particular avocation just now, Derrington? Are you still at the old game?"

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"Still at the old game," I replied, nodding my head solemnly. "I suppose I will always be at it in one way or another."

"Your government won't let you go very far away from its reach," he said, with a quizzical smile.

"Oh, the government! I have cut it, Alexis."

"What? Left the service?"

"Temporarily," I replied, and he laughed again as loudly as before. There was reason for his levity, because placing my resignation in the hands of the secretary had become a habit with me. I was periodically depressed by the duties of a secret service agent and as often determined to leave the service for good. But as often, I had returned to it upon the request of one department or another of my government, when my services were required in the line of some particular duty which officialdom was pleased to assure me could not be so well accomplished by any other person of its acquaintance. That was why Alexis Saberevski laughed.

"Is your resignation still on file? Or is it only lying on the table awaiting action, Daniel?" he

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asked me, and there was just a touch of ironic suggestion in his manner, which nettled me.

"The resignation is a fact this time," I replied. "I have earned a period of rest, and I propose to take it."

"Going abroad, Derrington?"

"No."

"Prefer to undergo the process of dry rot, here in New York?"

"Yes; for a time at least."

"Is there nothing on the other side of the water, that attracts you?"

"Nothing at all."

He switched his right leg to his left knee and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"You're not a lazy chap, Dan," he remarked, as if he were deeply considering the verity of that statement. "One wouldn't pick you out as a blasé individual who is tired of everything the world has to offer. You are as filled with energy and nervous force as any chap I ever knew; and you are not yet thirty-five."

"Quite true," I admitted.

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"Yet, like a craft that has fought its way through stormy seas around the world, you sit there and try to assure me that you are content to tie up against a rotting wharf, in an odorous slip, and pass the rest of your days in inaction. It isn't like you, Dan."

"It looks very enticing to me just now, however."

"The trouble is," he said, "that your American diplomacy and your amazing politics over here, offer no opportunities to a man of your talents. You should go against the pricks of European intrigue. You ought to butt in, as you fellows express it, upon French statecraft which leaves nothing to be desired in the way of double dealings. You should try Austrian lies, or German brutalities, or Italian and Spanish sophistry, or English stupidity. Believe me, one of these would offer many points of interest which should interest and engage your attention."

"Why not Russian cruelty?" I asked. "That seems to be the only important nationality you have omitted."

"Why not?" he repeated after me.

"You seem to have tired of it yourself, Saberevski."

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He shrugged his shoulders, leaning back in his chair, and the suggestion of a shadow passed across his handsome face.

"Dan," he said with an entire change of tone that startled me into renewed interest, "I haven't any doubt that you have always regarded me as a queer sort of chap, more or less shrouded by a mystery you could not fathom. And you were right."

"I have never —" I began. But he raised a hand to arrest me.

"I know it," he said. "You do not need to assure me of that. You are too much of a man, and your character is too broad and deep, for you ever to attempt an intimacy which was not invited. But it is my pleasure just now, old man, to give you a little bit of my history. It may interest you. And it may lead to a change in your views; not regarding you, but in connection with myself. I am a much older man than you are; fifteen years and more, I should say. All my life, up to the time we last parted, has been passed in the personal service of his majesty, the czar. I have been as close to him as any man can ever obtain, and I am probably the only

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one who has enjoyed his confidence to the extent of retaining it in the face of studied opposition on the part of the greatest nobles of the empire. But I have retained it, Dan, and to such an extent that I suppose myself to be the only man living to-day, against whom Alexander would not permit himself to be influenced. There is a reason for it and a good one, but I need not go into that."

"No," I said. "You need not tell me this at all, Alexis. I am quite glad enough to see you and to have you here, without explanation."

He made a gesture of impatience.

"As if I did not know that," he added; "but as I said a moment ago, it is my pleasure to recite some of these things to you, because since I came into this room and grasped your hand I have been impressed by the idea that there is a great work for you to do; a great duty for you to perform. A stupendous obstacle to human development exists in one part of Europe to-day, which I believe you could overcome and demolish, if only you could be convinced of it. I wonder, Dan, if you would give the subject any thought if I were to suggest it to you?"

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"Try," I said.

"I wonder if you would seriously consider one of the greatest achievements that remains undone in Europe to-day," he added, meditatively.

"The obstacle to which you just now referred?" I asked.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Nihilism."

"Hell!" I replied with emphasis.

But he took me literally, and not even the suggestion of a smile showed in his face as he replied:

"That is the fitting word, Dan. It is hell. It is worse than that to hundreds of thousands of human beings, from the lowest *mujik* of the steppes, to the czar himself. It is a word which carries with it a certain magic which always spells the word death. It is death to those who antagonize it, and it is death to them that uphold it. It is death to the minister, the governor, the official, and it is death to the poor devil who plots in the dark, secretly with his fellows, against the powers that rule him.

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Nihilism is well named, for it means nothing and it ends in nothing. *Nihilo nihil fit!* Whoever named the revolutionists of Russia so, builded better than they knew."

I was watching Saberevski with some amazement. I had never heard him express himself in such terms before, and I had not supposed him capable, sympathetically, of doing so. I was not without a certain fund of knowledge regarding the subject he had introduced, for my professional duties had taken me more than once into Russia, and I had encountered much of the conditions he described. But I regarded them, as well as Saberevski himself, with the American idea and from an American standpoint. It had always seemed to me so unnecessary that conditions should exist as I had heard them described over there. I had always believed that if the government of Russia would only go about the work differently, it would be so easy to eradicate every phase of the so-called nihilism, and especially that branch of it practiced by those who are called extremists. Evidently Saberevski entertained some-

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thing of this view himself, although from the standpoint of a Russian, for he ended a short silence between us by saying:

"I have not finished what I was going to tell you, Dan. I have served Alexander, the czar, many years, and served him faithfully. There are reasons now why I can serve him no longer, in the capacity and at the places where he needs me most. My life which is of small moment, and his who is my royal master, would not be worth the weight of a feather if I were to show my face at St. Petersburg again. There is nothing remaining for me to do save to sit down quietly in some far country of the world, and watch from a distance the passing of events which some day, near or far as the case may be, will end in his assassination. What my work has been and what it would still be if I could remain near to his imperial majesty, you can guess, and I need not give it a name. But Dan, if I could succeed in convincing you of the opportunity that would be yours if you should go there, and if I could know that you had gone, determined to offer your services where they are most needed, then that far

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corner of the world where I would wait and watch events, would become a peaceful spot to me, for I know that you could succeed where all others have failed."

Alexis Saberevski and I had many such conversations as that one, after that, in which we discussed pro and con the suggestion he had made.

It grew upon me and grew upon me until I became obsessed by the idea although I did not think that he guessed my eagerness.

He remained in New York, and virtually became my guest at the club, during more than two months, and we were as constantly together as was possible and convenient.

One afternoon while we were chatting as usual, I called his attention to a paragraph I had seen in the *Herald* of that morning which announced the arrival in New York of a Russian princess. The fact had not interested me, but recalling at the instant the idea that she was most likely known to my friend, I said:

"Saberevski, one of your countrywomen, a princess whose name escapes me for I did not

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notice it particularly, arrived in the city this morning, and is at one of the hotels. I mention it because you may not have seen the notice, and might like to pay your respects to her. You will find her name and a column or more of other information concerning her, in this morning's *Herald*."

"Thank you," he said, "I will look it up."

More than a week later while I was walking down Fifth avenue, a hansom cab stopped at the curb beside me, and Saberevski's face looked out.

"Jump in, Dan," he said. "I want you to take a ride with me;" and with no thought of hesitation, I complied. I did not even ask to be told our destination and was somewhat surprised when our conveyance stopped at one of the North river steamship piers.

"You are not leaving the country, are you, Alexis?" I asked, as we got down.

"No," he replied; "but someone I know is leaving. Will you walk to the end of the pier with me, or will you wait here?" I recalled, later, that even then he left the choice to me.

I accompanied him to the end of the pier. I

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asked no question concerning the person he had referred to, as sailing that day, and thought it rather strange that he seemed to seek no one, and expressed no desire to go aboard the vessel then about ready to steam away.

When it had swung into the stream I ran my glance along the decks of the vessel from stem to stern, seeking a waving hand or a gesture of farewell directed towards my friend. But I saw none to which he seemed to respond, until the ship was well into the current, when he suddenly raised his hand and waved it.

At the same instant he took me by the arm and we returned to our conveyance.

The following day at the club he came to me and placed a sealed envelope in my hand. It bore no address or superscription of any kind; but he said in giving it to me:

"Dan, I wish you would put this sealed envelope inside one of your pockets and carry it with you carefully until the time arrives to open it."

"When will that be?" I asked him.

"It will be when, some day in the future, you shall

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be about to depart from the city of St. Petersburg." And as I showed some astonishment in my face, he continued: "Fate, or inclination, will take you there again, sometime, and the day will naturally follow when you will leave it. Count this sealed envelope as one of the mysteries in which I delight to wrap myself. But remember what I have asked you to do."

"Repeat it," I said to him.

"When you are about to take your departure from the city of St. Petersburg, if you should go there again, break the seal of this envelope and read the contents of a message I have written; or if your business should detain you there continuously, read it anyhow after six months. That is all."

"And if I should not go there?" I asked him.

"In that case, keep the letter until you see me again, and return it unopened."

Some months later I was in St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER V

IN THE PRESENCE OF THE CZAR

I HAD been in St. Petersburg less than an hour and was still pondering over the uncertainty of what first to do in order to begin the difficult task that I had set for myself, when I was startled by a sharp summons at my door.

It opened before I could respond, and a total stranger entered the room. That he was an officer of that mysterious force known as the Russian Secret Police I had not a doubt, but I greeted him courteously, pretending not to see that there were others with him, who waited in the hallway.

"I believe I have the honor of addressing Mr. Derrington," he said in perfect English, making use of my true name which however, was not the one mentioned in my passports, for I had crossed the border under the name of Smith. I bowed and indicated a chair which he declined with a wave of

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his hand but with a smile that was as genial as his face was masterful and handsome. "Perhaps you prefer to be called Mr. Smith," he continued. "It is, I understand, the name that is mentioned in your papers."

"For the present, yes," I replied.

"I regret that I am compelled to place you under arrest, Mr. Smith, but such is my unfortunate duty. You will have to take a short drive with me. I hope that you will not be detained beyond your patience. Take your wraps, and we will go at once if you please."

"Certainly. Shall I leave the keys to my baggage here?" I knew Russia and I did not protest.

"Thank you, yes; it will simplify matters. I have friends here who will take charge of your rooms until you return, or —" He did not finish the sentence but that inimitable smile shone upon me again and somewhat assured me, in spite of the fact that my perfect knowledge of Russian affairs rendered me thoroughly aware of my peril.

We were presently in the street and driving rapidly away; whither, I did not know, for my com-

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panion pulled down the curtains so that I could see nothing of the scenes through which we were passing. I tried to keep note in my mind of the turns we made, and to remember the streets we traversed, but it was useless and I was convinced that my conductors were purposely confusing me. This conviction forced upon me another; that my escort, or the people who had sent him to me, were informed regarding my past, and had somehow learned that I knew St. Petersburg as well as they did.

During the drive which lasted nearly an hour we remained perfectly silent. I knew how utterly useless it would be to question the man at my side, and he volunteered not a word. Presently the pace was increased until the horses were on a run through the streets; then suddenly we flew around a corner at breakneck speed and stopped so abruptly that I was thrown forward on my face in spite of the robes in which I was swaddled. At the same moment I heard a gate clang shut behind us and was respectfully bidden to alight.

Night had just fallen when we left the hotel, and in the grim courtyard where I found myself after

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the ride there was nothing discernible save the shadowy forms of my abductors, the champing, foam-flecked horses, and the somber walls of a huge building which loomed up on three sides of me. I had very little time for thought, for my companion took me familiarly by one arm and led me forward until we passed through a door which I did not see until it swung open before us. Then it closed as silently and as magically as it had opened, and I was led onward through darkness that was absolute, through corridors and rooms, at last emerging upon a dimly lighted hall, which seemed almost brilliant by comparison. There we paused and waited.

"This does not seem like a prison," I said.

"No; but it has often led to one," he replied grimly. "One word of advice to you before we proceed."

"I shall appreciate it. Heaven knows I need it."

"Do not on any account ask a single question during the experiences of the next half hour. Forget that there is such a thing as an interrogation. Perhaps, if you heed what I say, I may have the pleasure of riding back to your hotel with you."

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I did not have time to reply, for a door opened and we started forward again, passing from room to room, each better lighted than the last, until finally we entered one that was occupied. A man — a very large man — was seated at a desk, and he raised his eyes as we entered his presence. Never in my life was I so astonished as at that moment for I recognized him at a glance.

I was in the presence of the czar.

There was a very good reason for my astonishment. I had gone to St. Petersburg in the hope of obtaining an audience with the Emperor of all the Russias, but I had anticipated some difficulty in securing it, nor did I even wish for it in such a forcible and unsought manner. It was because I desired to keep the object of my visit a close secret that I had travelled incognito, and as I had imparted my secret to no living human being, I was naturally astounded that my object should be so quickly attained. A mental question shot through me in that instant when I realized where I was: In what manner could any person have learned of the true reason for my visit? and if it had not been learned and

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transmitted to the czar, why was I conducted to the august presence? At the same instant I comprehended that it would be the best policy for me to appear not to know in whose presence I was, so I simply inclined my head in the coldest bow I could master.

"You speak Russian?" he demanded imperiously, advancing a step towards me.

"Perfectly," I replied.

"Your name!"

"Daniel Derrington." I purposely made my reply as curt as his question, and I saw the shadow of a smile flit across his features. I knew then that I had taken the right course with him.

"What is your nationality?"

"I am an American."

"Do you know who I am?"

"I do, your majesty." This time I bowed with more show of ceremony, but he waved his hand commandingly, and in a voice much softer than he had used before, went on:

"Forget that you do know. It is more than likely

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that we will have many interviews of this kind and I wish them all to be on the plane of equals. That, I believe, is a condition which will come quite naturally to an American although it would be utterly impossible to a European. Are you as well acquainted with the identity of your companion? "

"I regret to say that I am not," I replied, relapsing into my former manner.

"Then permit me to introduce you. Mr. Derrington, the Prince Michael Michaelovitch Gortshakoff. And now that you know each other, we will proceed. But first, be seated."

My business during several years had taken me into astonishing situations, but never into one so astounding as this. I racked my brain in wondering what it could portend; in conjecturing if it were real, or if it were only the "heartly meal before the execution." I longed to ask a few questions, but remembering the advice that had been given me just before entering the room, I refrained.

"You will be surprised to learn that I am entirely aware of the object of your presence in Russia,"

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continued his majesty, "for unless I am mistaken you believed your errand to be an inviolate secret. Is that true?"

"Quite true."

"And yet it is known to me. The best proof of that is that you are here."

I bowed.

"I knew a few hours after you left your own country, that you had started. I was fully acquainted with your mission. My eyes, or the eyes of those who are in my confidence, have not been off you one moment since you arrived in Europe. They followed you to Paris, across Germany, and even into the hotel where our friend called upon you and where you are known as Mr. Smith." He paused an instant, and turning to the prince, added: "Tell him the prospective fate of Mr. Smith, prince."

"Siberia," came the reply in one word, uttered calmly and coldly.

"Siberia?" I repeated after him, and shrugged my shoulders; and the czar added:

"Siberia."

CHAPTER VI

THE NIHILIST SPY

THE hackneyed simile of the cat and the mouse seemed to me to be especially applicable in the present instance. In one breath I was told that there would be many interviews of the kind I was then enjoying (?), and in the next that my destination was Siberia. It was certainly paradoxical and somewhat threatening, but I still refrained from asking questions. Presently, as I made no further comment, the emperor resumed the conversation.

"What brought you to Russia?" he demanded, but in a tone that was not unkind.

"The desire to obtain an interview with you," I replied, remembering his caution for me to ignore his rank.

"For what purpose?"

"To enter your service."

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"In what capacity?"

"In any capacity for which I seem most fitted."

His majesty smiled broadly as if my replies suited the humor he was in. I knew that I had made an impression that was not detrimental to me in his eyes, and thought that I began to see through the puzzle. The succeeding few moments convinced me that I was not mistaken.

"Whose was the suggestion that determined your visit to Russia?" he continued.

"The suggestion came to me a long time ago — more than a year," I responded. "Since then it has been constantly in my mind, and at last I decided to act upon it."

"That does not answer my question, Mr. Der-rington."

"The idea first came to me through an old friend; one whom I used to know here, in this country; one who afforded me very great assistance when I was here three years ago on a secret mission for my government."

"What is his name?"

"I have forgotten it."

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"You are troubled with a poor memory, sir."

"Yes; concerning the names of friends who have assisted me when they have been compelled to place their own interests in jeopardy in order to do so."

"Do you know Alexis Saberevski?"

"I do."

"Can you tell me where he is now?"

"In New York, I think."

"Did you not have a definite proposition to make to me, in case you were successful in securing an audience?"

"I did."

"Very well, you have secured the audience. I will hear the proposition."

I hesitated. Here before me ready at my hand was the very opportunity I had so eagerly sought and which I had determined to go to many lengths to obtain. Already I had undertaken great expense to arrive at this moment and to encounter a circumstance very like the one by which I was now confronted; and yet I hesitated to take his majesty at his word and to render up the proposition he required of me, and which I had travelled so far and

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gone to such pains to submit. But you will admit that the circumstance was an unusual one, and that the very manner of my introduction to the Czar of all the Russias was calculated to be confounding to me and to place at naught my customary determined poise, and unswerving self-reliance. The abrupt mention of Alexis Saberevski, coupled with other insinuations already brought forward in our conversation, confirmed me in the idea already half formed, that my apparent arrest at the hotel, my strange and mysterious journey through the night, and the threat of Siberia, were all in the nature of what we Americans call a "bluff"; were only intended to conceal the real purpose of this enforced interview. During that moment of hesitation, which was so short that it would not have been noticeable to a disinterested party, I decided that the perfectly frank and open course would be the best one to adopt with this giant of a man who confronted me; a giant not only in physique and stature, and in strength of purpose as well as in muscle, but in the wonderful power he swayed by the mere exertion of his will.

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I glanced upward into his eyes, which were bent half quizzically and not at all unkindly upon me, and then in words that flowed easily, and which came to me like an inspiration, I stated almost in one sentence, and certainly in one paragraph, the concise explanation of my presence in St. Petersburg at that moment. I said:

"I believe that I can organize and maintain a secret service bureau in your majesty's interest, which will be more effective than all the present police force put together. In order to do so I must have my own way entirely, must be absolute master of the situation, as far as my men are concerned, and can have no superior officer—not even the czar himself. My plans have been formulated with care, and I can go into minute details whenever I am directed to do so."

"Modesty is not one of your accomplishments, Mr. Derrington."

"Possibly not; but thorough familiarity with the work I would do is one. Interference with my duties by any one no matter how high in place, would

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render my efforts impotent, and I should decline under such circumstances to undertake the task I have set for myself."

"What is that task?"

"The utter dismemberment and destruction of an organization of anarchists known as nihilists against whom I have already been twice pitted, and both times successfully."

The czar arose from his chair and crossed the room to the window where he stood for some time peering out into the darkness, in the interim drumming ceaselessly on the pane with the tips of his fingers. During that time there was not a word spoken. Presently he turned and came back to the chair where I was seated, towering over me like a veritable giant, the most magnificent specimen of masculine humanity I have ever seen; and according to his lights, as good as he was great in stature. When ultimately the nihilists succeeded in destroying him, they killed the best friend that Russia ever had on the throne. They did not, could not know it; but I do.

"Mr. Derrington," he said, speaking with great deliberation, as though he weighed each word he

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uttered, "we will end this farce of questions and answers. They are unnecessary as far as I am concerned, and are unworthy of you. A long time ago I held a conversation in this very room with your friend Alexis Saberevski who possesses my entire confidence. In that conversation he recommended you to me, and I directed him to put the bee in your bonnet that has been buzzing there ever since; so you see that I really sent for you, although you did not know it. It was necessary that I should first be entirely convinced that I could trust you implicitly, before entering into negotiations with you. I am convinced. I accept your service. You will sleep in the palace to-night, and to-morrow we will discuss your plans in detail. Mr. Smith has been arrested as a nihilist, and the morning papers will announce that he has started on his journey to Siberia. Mr. Derrington will remain in St. Petersburg and to-morrow he will decide what disposition to make of himself. The prince will act as your host for to-night."

I got upon my feet and bowed to him, but he extended his hand in the most cordial manner; and

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with a genial smile upon his face which rendered it handsome, and which won my affection as well as my respect, said:

"It will be a pleasure to me to be upon terms of familiarity with one who wears no title and who does not wish for one. Henceforth we will count ourselves as friends, and forget relative positions and rank. Give me your hand."

I was nearly as tall as he but much more slight in build, and my hand was almost lost in his great palm when they were clasped together. I forgot the czar in the magnificence of the man, and as I gave him my hand, I said:

"My life goes with it, sir, if the necessity arises."

"I believe you, Mr. Derrington. In the morning I will send for you. Good night."

Then I followed the prince from the room and was presently conducted to an apartment which evidently had been designed for me; at least I so decided when I had an opportunity to examine it and to familiarize myself with all that it contained. The prince found some Russian cigarettes on the table, and lighted one while he said laughingly: "I see

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that you are prepared to entertain your guests, Mr. Derrington. Shall we chat together a little before we part for the night?"

"If you will be so good as to remain with me, at least until I catch my breath, I will esteem it a great favor," I replied. "Is the boycott of the interrogation removed?"

"Certainly."

"Then will you please tell me how the dev —"

A hearty laugh interrupted me.

"I know all that you would ask," he said. "Our mutual friend Alexis is more in the confidence of his majesty than any other man in the world, and this plot to induce you to come here and offer your services to the czar, was deliberately planned between them nearly three years ago. From time to time Alexis dropped little hints to you which set you to thinking, and the thought finally blossomed into action. Had you confided your plans to anybody, even to Alexis, your services would not have been accepted. As it is, after to-morrow I tremble for you in the power that you will have, for in many ways it will be as great as that of the czar

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himself. Shall I give you a bit of history in order that you may know something of what is expected of you?"

"If you will do so."

"Peter the Great organized a system of police which still endures, though to-day it contains only three members, the emperor, Alexis and myself. It is called the Fraternity of Silence. During all these years its members have been selected with the greatest care and with increasing difficulty so that now it has dwindled to nothing. In the mean time the necessity for it has grown greater, for nihilism infests the country like a plague. Without nihilism in Russia, Siberia would be unnecessary. The very faults which nihilism seeks to remedy are kept alive by its existence. If it were eradicated Russia would take its place among the liberal nations of the world, and it is the ambition of Alexander to perform that service for the empire he controls, just as it was his idea to free the serfs. But the character of our people is different from that of any other people in the world, and your task is not so much to find out and banish those who conspire against the czar, as it will

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be to convert the men who organize such conspiracies. You are to reorganize the Fraternity of Silence on a new plan, and the power to act upon your own judgment will be absolute. It may seem strange to you that considering yourself almost unknown you should have been selected for this work, but you must remember that you have been recommended by one whose word is entirely respected by the emperor, and that you have been under careful espionage for three years. Does the outline that I have given you accord with the plans which you thought of submitting to the czar?"

"Yes; largely."

"Plots for the assassination of the emperor are hatching every day. Our present system is not adequate. You must fill the breach."

"Is the existence of this organization of which you speak known to anybody, prince?"

"To nobody save those whom I have mentioned."

"Not to any nihilist?"

"Alexander, Alexis, you and I are the only living beings who ever heard of it. No one else has ever known of it."

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"Will you pardon me, prince, if I tell you that you are mistaken?"

"Mistaken! Do you mean, Mr. Derrington, that you doubt my word?"

He got upon his feet and I saw that he was angry, believing that I had wantonly offended him. I arose also and began to pace up and down the room taking care that each turn would bring me nearer to the heavy curtains which hung about one of the great windows. The prince repeated his question, this time in a louder and angrier tone than before, and when I made no reply was about to leave the room; but I made a sign that compelled him to pause. At the same instant, being sufficiently near the curtain, I made a quick leap forward and with all my strength struck with my fist the exact point behind which I thought the head of the concealed person should be located.

My aim was true and the blow was sufficient, for the body behind the curtain crashed against the hard-wood casing of the window and then sank to the floor, motionless, and in another instant I had dragged into view the senseless form of a man in the livery of the

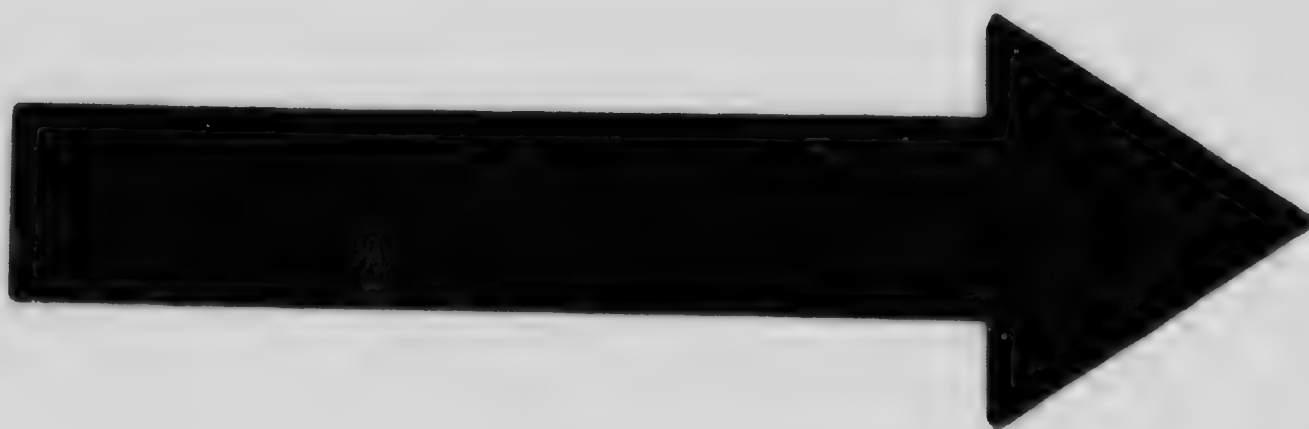
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palace servants — a man whom the prince instantly recognized as a trusted servitor of the czar — one who had been told that a guest was expected to occupy that chamber, and who had been detailed to wait upon me — one who had been especially selected for his loyalty and discretion.

"That man heard and knew, and to-morrow the nihilists would have heard and known. Let us hope that they do not already know more than they should," I said, indicating the spy, and smiling up at the prince.

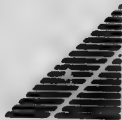
The fellow was evidently not a Russian. He was a tall man, lithe and sinewy rather than muscular, but he had a handsome, Patrician face; and despite his condition of insensibility, or perhaps because of it, he seemed strangely out of place in the predicament in which he was now discovered.

It was an extremely fortunate thing that I had become sensible of his presence in the room almost from the first, and that I had been able, therefore, to direct the conversation and my line of conduct, to the point of the present denouement. I could realize just how shocked Prince Michael was by the event;



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just how puzzled his own reasoning powers were for the moment, because of this discovery of a spy concealed in the private room of the palace, who might, if I had not so fortunately discovered him, have betrayed the real purpose of my presence there, even before the accomplishment of any results.

I had expected to find a net work of spies surrounding the palace of the Czar of all the Russias, as well as inside it, and I knew because of my former experiences in the Moscovite capital, with what I would have to contend if circumstances permitted me, as they now promised to do, to take up and to perform what I considered would be the greatest work of my life. There before me on the floor, prostrate and senseless, although rapidly returning to consciousness, was the undoubted personal proof of the deadly danger of my mission; but as I had foreseen and forestalled this incident, so I believed I would be able to foresee and forestall others that would be like unto it; and I determined to make the most of this one, by using it to an advantage which had instantly occurred to me when I saw and read

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the physiognomy, and behind that, the character of the man on the floor. His features and the general air of refinement about him, notwithstanding his dress and position, suggested refinement, and I believed that I could appeal to him in a way that would call forth some response if I were given the opportunity to do so. He was lying on his back with his right arm outstretched, and while the prince and I stood there regarding him with such different emotions, his eyelids fluttered and parted and he once more became conscious of his surroundings.

Beside him on the floor, was a long knife, which I have no doubt he would have used upon me had my attack been less sudden and violent. As it was, he opened his eyes and gazed sullenly upon us, realizing better than I did, the fate that was in store for him now. I used the silken curtain cords with which to bind him, and when that was accomplished, placed him on one of the couches.

"Was it your intention to commit suicide when you entered this room to spy upon us?" I asked; but he did not reply. "Prince," I added, turning

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to my companion, "I think if you will leave me alone with this man, I will find a way to make him talk. Will you return in half an hour?"

"Would it not be better to —"

"Must I wait until to-morrow for my authority?" I asked, smiling. So the prince bowed and left me alone with the spy.

CHAPTER VII

FOR LOVE OF A WOMAN

I HAD discovered at a glance that the spy was not a Russian; and that being the case he was presumably engaged in his present occupation for pay only, and I believed that I could turn what seemed to be a catastrophe into a decided advantage. Experience had taught me long ago that the Russian nihilist is a fanatic who possesses distorted ideas of patriotism upon which he builds a theory of government, and that nothing short of death can turn him from his purpose. But with the foreigners who ally themselves with the fortunes of the nihilists — Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, etc. — it is different. They are always open to argument — for pay — although they are hardly to be relied upon even then, for they will sell out to another with the same celerity with which they formerly disposed of themselves to you.

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"You are a Frenchman, are you not?" I asked this man, as soon as we were alone together.

"Yes," he replied, reluctantly.

"Do you know what is in store for you now?"

"Siberia, or death; one is as bad as the other. I'm only sorry that I did not have a chance to use my knife before you struck me; that's all."

"I have not a doubt of it. And yet you may escape both, Siberia and death, if you are reasonable."

"How? I'll be reasonable fast enough if you can prove that to me."

"Do you speak English?"

"Yes; as well as I do French, and Russian, and German, and half a dozen other languages."

"Then you heard and understood everything that passed between the prince and me?"

"Certainly. I might have pretended that I did not, if I had thought to do so. Still it would have made no difference, any way."

"Not much, that's a fact. Why did you hide in this room?"

"To hear what you said. To get what informa-

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tion I could. I certainly did not do it for the fun of the thing."

"Well, my man, I will make a bargain with you. If you will tell me all that I want to know and answer truthfully every question I ask, I will engage that you shall neither go to Siberia nor to your death. You will go to prison, and I will keep you there long enough to find out if your information is correct. If it is, I will set you free as soon as I can afford to do so; if it is not, then Siberia, and the worst that there is in that delightful country, too. What do you say?"

"How long will you keep me in prison?"

"A month — six months — a year — as long as I deem it necessary. I shall want you near me where I can talk to you frequently, whenever the fancy takes me."

"I'll see you damned first."

"Very well. I'm sorry for you. A few months in a comfortable prison, with the best of food, books to read, paper and pens at your disposal, permission to communicate with your friends as often as you

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please so long as I see your letters before they are sent away, ought to be preferable to ending your life in the mines of frozen Siberia; but the choice is yours."

"It is."

"Then why don't you accept my offer?"

"Because I don't believe you. You will get all that you want out of me, and then I will travel East any way."

"That is a chance that you will have to take." I arose and walked across the room to give him an opportunity to think it over. "You look to me like one who has seen better days," I said, when I returned. "You evidently came from a very good family; you are an educated man, and you are young. In all probability you joined the nihilists without really meaning to do so, and having later been selected for this work here, on account of your ability, you were afraid to refuse it. Suppose that I should keep you imprisoned a year, or even two, what is that to the fate that awaits you if you refuse to do as I ask, or to that which you would

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have met, if you had refused to obey the men who commanded you to come here? Answer me."

"A joke."

"Precisely. Now, here is another question. If I should let you go free after you betray those men to me, what would your life be worth the moment you got upon the street, even if I provided you with passports out of the country?"

"Nothing."

"They would find you, wouldn't they?"

"To a certainty."

"And kill you?"

"As surely as you stand there."

"On the other hand, if I send you to a prison here in St. Petersburg, as I have proposed, you will be thought by them to be dead, or in Siberia, which is about the same thing. In the mean time you can write to any one whom you wish to have know that you are still alive; you can receive replies under an assumed name, and —"

"Enough, sir. I accept. You guessed rightly when you said that I am not a nihilist at heart. I

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am one because I love a woman who is one. That will suffice for the present. Later, I may tell you more about it. I am disposed to make another condition concerning her but I see that it would be useless; and perhaps you will grant me a favor if I ask it, when you discover that I have not deceived you in what I shall tell you."

"You may be quite sure of it, if it is a reasonable one. Now tell me your name."

"You do not care about my true name, I suppose?"

"I want the one by which you are known among the nihilists."

"Jean Morét."

"And here, in the palace?"

"The same."

"I shall send you to your prison now. I cannot promise what it will be for to-night. To-morrow I will see you and will keep my word in every respect. In the mean time I want you to think over all that you have to say to me so that we may lose as little time as possible when we meet again."

I left him then and went to the door. Outside,

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waiting in the corridor was the prince, and in a few words I explained to him what had taken place during his absence at the same time apologizing for having sent him from the room. Then I asked that the captain of the palace guard be sent for, and in a few moments Jean Morét was placed in his care. After that the prince and I smoked another cigarette together and then parted for the night.

"Mr. Derrington," he said, as he was about to take his leave, "I am more than ever convinced that you are the right man in the right place. Tell me how you discovered the presence of that spy. I had no idea that he was there, and thought that we were entirely alone."

"I knew he was there the moment we entered the room," I replied. "It is my habit to glance at everything in sight whenever I enter an apartment, and I do it now without realizing that I do so, if you can understand the seeming paradox. When we passed the threshold I saw instantly that one of the curtains did not hang properly, so I seated myself in a position from which I could keep it in view. Twice I saw that it moved; a very little to be sure,

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but enough to satisfy me that somebody was concealed behind it. That is the reason why I rather forced the conversation in English. The rest you know. I am convinced that the man we captured is the victim of circumstances, and I think I can make him very valuable."

"Well," acknowledged the prince, "there might have been a man behind every one of the curtains and I would not have thought to suspect it. This service alone, Mr. Derrington, is worth all the pay you will draw from Russia."

"Yes," I replied, "for I believe that the spy will confess to me that he was sent there with orders to murder the czar."

"My God! And even now there may be others of the same sort in the palace."

"No; I hardly think that. The nihilists would not be likely to send more than one at a time on such a dangerous errand."

Morét confessed to me the following day, and I speedily was convinced that my suppositions concerning him were correct. He had not had the brutal courage to carry out his orders; and already

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he had received several warnings from his compatriots that if another week passed without his accomplishment of the design, his own life would pay the forfeit. He was in that room awaiting my arrival when he heard me approaching with the prince, and had concealed himself behind the curtain without any definite purpose other than to hear all that he could.

It is hardly necessary, and there is not space, for me to go into the details of my subsequent talks with Morét. Suffice it to say that the information I gleaned in that way, proved of inestimable value to my work. From it I learned the names of all the leading nihilists of St. Petersburg and Moscow, their meeting places, their passwords, and several of their ciphers. Concerning their plans for the future, beyond those in which he was personally engaged, Morét knew almost nothing; but he did put me in the way of finding out nearly all that I wished to know. Nor is it necessary that I should describe my subsequent interviews with the emperor. My plans were adopted almost without a correction — and most of those I suggested myself — so that

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by the time I had been an inmate of the palace for a week, the reorganization of the Fraternity of Silence was well under way, and ere a month had passed it was an established fact.

There was one point upon which Morét stubbornly refused to talk, and that was concerning the woman who had led him into the difficulty, and who, he confessed, was the brains and the real head of the society. I questioned him very closely and so decided in my own mind that she was prominent at the capital; but at the last he positively refused to answer any further questions concerning her, saying that he would rather go to Siberia and have done with it at once, than to betray her. I desisted, therefore, believing that ultimately he would denounce her to me without knowing that he had done so, and events proved that I was right although they also demonstrated that it would have been much better for all concerned had he trusted me implicitly in the beginning.

Thus, at the end of a month succeeding the night of my ride from the hotel to the palace with the prince, I was prepared to commence work in earnest;

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but it must not be supposed that I had been idle, personally, during that time.

In fact I was never so busy in all my life as during those four weeks of preparation for the stupendous task I had set myself; and you will understand that there were countless things to do, unnumbered details to arrange, and a thousand and one ramifications of the work to be planned and plotted and thoroughly comprehended, not alone by myself, but by the men I would gather around me to work under my direction.

The organization of a secret service bureau, no matter how general may be its duties, is at least a monumental task; but the organization of such a bureau as this one whose very existence must remain a secret from all the world, presented difficulties not to be met with or contended against under any other circumstances.

It was necessary that I should become the chief over an army of men, and it was equally imperative that not one person among the rank and file of that army should know of my existence, as it was related to them. With the chiefs of departments and sec-

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tions, it was necessary that I should have intercourse and interviews, but I had already made my mental selection of persons to fill those positions, when I arrived in St. Petersburg, and the organization of the several departments was to be left in their hands.

I was determined that there should be no phase of Russian life which could hide itself away from the skill of my investigating forces; from palace to hovel, from the highest official in the Russian diplomatic service and in the army to the meanest servant or laborer, my sources of knowledge must extend, and every detail of it all must necessarily be so complete as to render it not only exact, but absolutely under my personal control and direction, without however in any way creating the suspicion that I was personally interested. Presently you will understand more perfectly how this all came about, and in quite a natural way it would seem, for always things accomplished seem easy enough to the casual observer; and you who read are only observers after all. You are receiving a bit of unwritten history which closely concerned the Russian empire and without which the assassination of Alexander would un-

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doubtedly have happened many years before it did, for I give to myself the credit of having extended the days of that really great but much misunderstood Moscovite gentleman.

At the time of my appearance in St. Petersburg the forces of nihilism had assumed proportions greater than they had ever attained before or will ever attain to again, thanks to my activities. The palace itself was a hotbed of conspiracy; the rank and file of the army was so disaffected that the officers never knew whom they could depend upon or whom they might trust; a secret pressure of the thumb, indeterminate in its character but nevertheless significant, was likely to be received from any hand clasp, no matter where given or with whom exchanged, and a princess or a countess was as likely to bestow it upon you as any ordinary person whom you might chance to meet. The pressure itself was merely a tentative question which might be translated by the words: "Are you a nihilist?" and you might understand it and reply to it by a returning pressure of acquiescence, or ignore it utterly, as you pleased. The pressure itself was so slight, was care-

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lessly given and might so readily be attributed to a careless motion of the hand that it could not betray the person who made it; nor could the answering pressure do so.

I had not been long at the palace before I discovered that many of the high officials who had ready and constant access there had become inoculated with the nihilistic bacilli and although I had no doubt that many of them were at heart loyal to the emperor, I already knew better than they did the immensity of the obligation they had undertaken in swearing allegiance to an association of persons dominated by fanatics and by actual criminals whose trade was murder and whose chiefest pleasures and relaxation was the study of how best to bring about entire social upheaval.

The confession of Morét enabled me to read every sign however slight that was made by these persons and the four weeks of my domicile in the apartment of the palace that had been assigned to me served me as nothing else could have done in this respect.

You have already been told that this was by no means my first experience in St. Petersburg and with

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nihilism; but I must confess that extensive as my information had been and was I had never for a moment contemplated the vast resources of this revolutionary order, its unlimited ramifications and its boundless possibilities for evil. To discover as I speedily did that princes of the blood, that ladies high in place, that generals in the army and lesser officers under them were among the ranks of the nihilists, was an astounding fact which I had not contemplated and which I was ill prepared to receive so soon after my arrival. It extended the requirements of my operation; it increased ten fold, nay a hundred fold, my obligations to the czar in whose service I was now sworn.

It seems difficult to imagine a beautiful woman as being at the head and front of such an organization which discusses murder and which arranges for wholesale assassination with the same equanimity of conscience that a hunting party at an English country estate would arrange for the slaughter of rabbits and pheasants.

But I was destined soon to discover that even this could be true. I was destined soon to be brought

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in contact with a beautiful woman who was not only high in place and a favorite with the czar himself, but who was veritably a leader in the plots against him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRINCESS' ORIENTAL GARDEN

IN order better to carry out the plans I had made it was necessary that I should depart from the palace and I secured apartments in a respectable but quiet section of the city, where I established myself under the name of Dubravnik; and it was generally understood by those who came in contact with me that I was a pardoned exile who had been permitted to return under stipulated conditions, as such men are sometimes, though rarely, allowed to do. In the mean time I had gathered around me several certain individuals whom I had known and employed in the past, and whom I knew from experience that I could trust; and there was not one Russian among them. The Russian may be trusted always wherever his heart is involved and his political conscience is at rest, but never unless those

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forces are working in sympathy with the employment of his hands and head.

I sent to Paris for Michael O'Malley whose long residence there had outwardly transformed him from an Irishman to a Frenchman, and who for convenience spelled his name Malet, thus retaining the sound without the substance. He opened a café, which because of its excellence speedily became the resort of the higher officers of the Russian army stationed at St. Petersburg. Every one of the waiters in his establishment were spies in his employ brought with him from Paris, and not one of them knew of my existence. Thus they did their work in the dark, but they did it well. Another Irishman, Tom Coyle, who looked like a Russian, established a cab stand on the English plan, and he had a small army of men under him who worked in the same way as Malet's servants. A Frenchman and his wife — their names were St. Cyr — ran a high class intelligence office, and furnished valets, maids, cooks, coachmen, etc., for the best families at the Russian capitol. I had one assistant who taught singing to the nobility, and another who was a master at

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arms and gave lessons in the science of handling all kinds of weapons. In the less pretentious quarters of the city I had proprietors of fourth rate cafés on my list; also loungers, loafers, seeming drunkards, laborers. But more important than these I succeeded in securing for one of my best men — an American — the management of the city Messenger Service; and one by one he contrived to replace the messengers by others of his own selection, until many of them were unknowingly members of my staff. Unknowingly, mind you, for therein existed much of the secret of my power. My workers did not know what they did. Canfield really did great work for me while he held that position, and I must not neglect to give him credit for it.

O'Malley, Coyle, the St. Cyrs and Canfield were really therefore the several component parts of my immediate staff and those five were the only persons among all my hundreds of workers who knew Dubravnik to be their chief; and it is a perfectly safe statement to say that in all St. Petersburg, nay in all the world at that time, there were but nine persons living who had the least knowledge or even

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suspicion of my business; the nine were the czar, Prince Michael, the five already named, myself and Morét now in solitary confinement although in a comfortably appointed room in one of the prisons.

It is well that I should say a word or two in reference to these assistants of mine, in passing.

O'Malley was an Irishman of the finest type of bluff and honest manhood. I have known him and tried him through many a difficulty where his sterling qualities of character, his rugged honesty of purpose, his unfailing loyalty and devotion to me and his uncanny qualities as an investigator had endeared him to me both professionally and personally beyond the expression of mere words to describe it. I knew that I could rely upon him absolutely in all emergencies and that he was utterly fearless in the face of any danger that might present itself. By opening the café described, patronized by the elite of the Russian capital he merely followed out a plan long before undertaken in Paris for a like purpose and through the workings of his waiters and other employees he possessed sources of information and facilities for investigation unprecedented in their far

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reaching possibilities. There is many a whispered word and undertoned conversation carried on at a supper table over the coffee or a bottle of wine which finds its way into the ears of servitors and O'Malley's duties consisted not alone in piecing together after they were supplied to him these scraps of conversation, but in having his workers spy upon certain personages when they appeared at the cafe and so anticipate secrets which they might have to unfold. Even he had lesser men in authority under him and many of those who were almost directly under his employ believed that they were allied to the regular secret police and did not know of their employer's official capacity.

Tom Coyle, a huge rough bearded Irishman who in outward appearance might have passed anywhere for a Russian, was not less efficient or less loved and trusted by me than O'Malley. As a proprietor of a cab stand every driver was a minion of his and served him precisely as O'Malley's waiters did their chief; and it may readily be determined that the power thus exerted for making reports, for knowing the distinction and the engagements of certain in-

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dividuals was far reaching indeed. Coyle also had served me in the execution of many delicate missions of the past and I could depend upon him almost as absolutely as I could upon myself.

The two St. Cyrs, husband and wife, were equally important factors in my work; indeed they provided the most far reaching assistance I had, for if you will stop to consider a moment and will realize how absolutely at the mercy of house servants the ordinary citizen is compelled to be, you will understand how an employment agency operated for the purposes of espionage can discover and reveal secrets which otherwise might never find their way outside the family circle. There is no written document, no locked bureau drawer, no hidden pocket, no secret hiding place into which the prying eyes and fingers of maid or valet, house maid and general servitor cannot penetrate. These people did their work for the St. Cyrs and reported to them, knowing nothing whatever of why they made those reports or to whom they ultimately found their way.

Canfield was also invaluable. As managing director of the Messenger Service with many of his

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employees working as spies, it was a comparatively easy matter to intercept letters and messages and to obtain a knowledge of the contents of documents through their skilled efforts.

I have given this resumé of conditions as I established them to avoid going into detail respecting the sources of the information I made use of, but it will be understood now how thorough was my knowledge whenever I chose to exert it.

During the time that passed as I have described, I became a factor in St. Petersburg society. Supposed to possess unlimited wealth (accumulated, by the way, in Mexican mines, for it sounded well), with the crest of a noble family then extinct and half forgotten ornamenting my cards and stationery, and introduced by Prince Michael, who was known to be high in favor with the czar, palace doors were thrown wide open to receive me. I was young then, and women said that I was handsome, while men found me genial, companionable, and their master at most games and with every sort of weapon; things which men respect even if they do resent them.

The regular police systems, even to the mysterious

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Third Section which has no equivalent or parallel in the world, were entirely ignorant of the existence of my espionage, and many times during the months that followed I fell under suspicion. My power was so much greater than theirs that I possessed one abundant advantage, that of knowing their spies; and many of these, from time to time, I purposely allowed to become inmates of my house, from which they inevitably carried away the precise information that I wished them to obtain.

By the time the organization of the fraternity was completed, I had information in my possession which if it had gone to the emperor, would have created a social upheaval such as has never been witnessed in history. But many of the most anarchistic and irrepressible leaders of the nihilists were quietly arrested and sent where they would be rendered harmless, and others who were less violent, I left undisturbed and in seeming security, knowing that they would ultimately lead me to the point I wished to attain, the very root of the evil which I had determined to eradicate; but it was six months after my arrival in St. Petersburg when I met with

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the adventure which I regarded as the most remarkable of my experience, and which is really the reason for this story.

"Well, Derrington," the prince said to me one night shortly after our return from a function of more than ordinary prominence. He had stopped at my rooms for a smoke and a chat before retiring. "Have you received an invitation from the princess?"

"What princess?" I asked.

"Zara de Echeveria, the most beautiful woman in Europe." He was smiling now, and seemed to take it for granted that I should know to whom he referred.

"The name is Spanish," I said; and I vaguely recalled having heard it somewhere before that day. But evidently it had made only slight impression upon my memory.

"Yes; her father was a Spaniard, but she is a Russian of the Russians. Her title is given her by courtesy, from her mother's family. Is it possible that you do not know about her?"

"Quite."

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"It is not remarkable, after all, for she left the city shortly after your arrival and has only just returned. I paid my respects to her yesterday, and took the liberty of suggesting that she add your name to her list. Look among your cards, and see if she has not sent you one."

It was among the first that my hand lighted upon and naturally we fell to discussing her. The rhapsodies concerning her in which the prince indulged led me to interpose a remark, for which I was instantly sorry.

"One would think that you were in love with her," I said.

His face fell instantly, and for a moment he was visibly confused, but at last, with a conscious smile, he said, boldly:

"Well, why not? I do not know that it is necessary to deny it since she is aware of it herself; and so, I think, is the whole city. I am a bachelor, and not turned fifty. Twenty-five years is not an impassable gulf, is it?"

"Certainly not, my dear prince. My remark was

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an ill timed pleasantry which you must pardon. Is she, then, so young?

"Twenty-five."

"Let me see; her ball is for to-morrow — or rather, to-night, since it is now morning."

"Yes. Will you go with me? I will then have the pleasure of presenting you."

"Thank you; yes."

I did not see the prince again until he called for me on his way to the house of the princess where we found the parlors thronged, so that it was with difficulty that we presently made our way among the massed guests to the point where Zara de Echeveria was receiving her friends. On our way to greet her, Prince Michael encountered many acquaintances who claimed a word with him, so at last he drew me aside and we waited until there was a lull in the efforts of the crush around her; then he led me forward.

"So glad to know you, Mr. Dubravnik," she said, in my own language. "The prince has told me that you have spent a long time abroad, and prefer

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to speak English. I am also fond of conversing in that tongue. Will you be seated?" She made a place for me beside her, and we were soon engaged in conversation.

The Princess Zara!

It is frequently the case that we meet people who antagonize us the moment a glance or a handshake is exchanged, while our inner consciousness offers no explanation for the reasonless antipathy; on the other hand Fate brings us sometimes in contact with personalities which at once appeal to a sixth sense which is unexplainable and indefinable, but which seems to comprehend more than the combined five educated and trained sensibilities. What is that sixth sense? Who can tell? I only know that in one moment I felt as if I had known the princess all my life, and I knew instinctively that the same influences were affecting her.

I will not attempt to describe her, more than to afford a mere outline for something that was indescribable, for the charm which pervaded the atmosphere around her was felt rather than seen. It would be unfair to call her beautiful, as the prince

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had done, for that word comprehends merely an outward and visible sign, and with the Princess Zara, although her beauty was striking, it was the least of her attractions. I had thought that I was born and had lived, devoid of that form of self consciousness which is called diffidence, although it is only an expression of egotism; but for the first time in my life I found myself ill at ease, and wondering if I was appearing to advantage. I was conscious of myself; and what was stranger still I realized that this trained society beauty, the undoubted heroine of unnumbered conquests, was as restless as I was.

Princess Zara!

The expression as I write it brings vividly back to me the moment when I stood beside her that night amid the throng of guests surrounding us, but nevertheless conscious only of her presence. There are some occasions in the lives of men which they are not inclined to dwell upon or even to speak about; which they preserve jealously, as secrets in their own hearts, selfishly indisposed to acquaint others with them lest some of the magic of the actual moment, reinduced

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by retrospection, may be lost in the telling. But I could not recite the history of my experiences in St. Petersburg at that time without uncovering my innermost soul, as it was affected and influenced by Zara de Echeveria, whose charm of manner, whose redundant beauty and powers of fascination, were beyond all effort at description.

Her eyes were like stars, and yet were not too brilliant. Glowing in their depths somewhere beyond visible ken, was the assurance of unspeakable promise; and there seemed to emanate from her personality a glowing enthusiasm which thrilled whomever came into her presence.

The mere outward description of personal beauty will be forever inadequate to describe the emotions that influence a man, when he sees for the first time, the feminine perfection of creation which he is destined to adore. One may be fascinated, attracted, by any one of many qualities, or by all of them combined; one may discover perfection of form or feature, and may accept these suggestions as comprising all that is necessary to engender that quality

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within us which we call love; but nearly always one finds that the imitation has been accepted for the real, and that it has been so accepted and claimed only because the genuine has never appeared.

But whenever a man finds the real one, whenever it is his good fortune to encounter the genuine article, there remains no doubt in his soul of its reality. He sees and feels and knows. There is no denying the absoluteness of it. It is a perfect knowledge brought home to him with an absoluteness, which for the moment, is almost paralyzing in its effect, and the immediate consequences of which are utterly beyond comprehension.

Standing there in the presence of Zara de Echeveria, surrounded as we were by throngs of guests, interrupted frequently as it was quite natural we should be, we two were yet as utterly alone as if we had been standing upon a solitary rock in the midst of a waste of waters beyond which the vision could not penetrate.

We were utterly alone in a world by ourselves; and the strange part of it was that we both seemed

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to realize the truth, although neither of us at that moment could contemplate the understanding of the other.

Until I drove with the prince to that house where she received, my whole mind and intelligence had been centered upon the work I had to do at the Russian capitol; but having passed the portals of Zara's palace, and being taken into her presence, made the whole world appear suddenly small indeed, and left all that was great, and good, and worth attaining, encompassed in the very small space in which she stood.

There was a sense of completeness to it all which is inexplicable; there was a compelling force emanating from her, like the energy of radium, unseen but all powerful, which dominated me as surely, though nonetheless subtly, as the sun dominates the planets

I have never remembered the words that passed between us at that first interview, for the reason that whatever I said, was uttered subconsciously, and became a mere incident in the great event. The meeting itself was the event. We had come together

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from different parts of the world. We were born of different nationalities. We had been nurtured differently, and every impulse of our respective lives had been trained in different grooves, and for different motives; and yet out of that chaos of differences had happened the wonderful thing of our meeting.

I suppose we talked as other people talk, who meet and part for the first time as we met and parted then, if we were to be judged from the standpoint and observation of others. To me it was an epoch, focused into a moment of time. To her I now know that it was the same.

I was suddenly conscious that there were many others who were waiting to claim her attention, and I got upon my feet.

"So soon, Mr. Dubravnik?" she said.

"Necessarily," I replied. "I cannot take to myself all the delight of the evening."

"You will return?"

"If I may — when you are less occupied."

I was acquainted with nearly all the guests and was stopped a dozen times on my way across the salon to where the prince was conversing with a

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knot of men, and as I glanced backward towards the princess with each pause I made, I always met her eyes fixed upon me — unconsciously until they met my gaze — even though she was engaged with the people who formed the group around her.

I did not seek the prince, after all. I turned aside realizing that I would rather be alone with the pleasurable thrill which still pulsed in my veins, than to crush it out with society talk, which was my particular aversion. I wandered on through the rooms, pausing for a moment here and there to exchange greetings with acquaintances, and at last emerged upon the glass-covered garden which was a miniature forest of shrubbery, palms and floral miracles. It was a spacious place dimly lighted by lamps that were shaded by red and green and yellow globes, and it was traversed by paths that were carpeted with Eastern rugs, and bordered by alluring nooks so daintily arranged and so suggestive of all things sentimental as to be indescribable. The garden was an Oriental paradise, blooming in the midst of a Russian winter; and I thought with a smile, a dangerous place for a bachelor even though he

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were alone — for it set him to thinking. As if to render the contrast even greater there was a furious snowstorm raging outside, and I could hear the wind howling and shrieking past the house, and the rattle of the snow as it hurled itself into fragments against the glass covering of the enclosure. I wandered on down the path I had taken as far as the extremity of the garden, and then turned into other paths. I paused once to light a cigar, and went on again, hither and thither, unheedingly; but at last I entered one of the Turkish nooks and composed myself comfortably among the cushions. There I gave myself up to the deliciousness of the hour, for no other word can describe it. There had seemed not to be another soul in the garden when I entered it, and I felt all that bliss which solitude lends to perfect surroundings. There might have been a thousand persons traversing the paths, and I could not have heard them, but I was presently startled out of my reveries by hearing my own name — or rather the one by which I was known — pronounced in a voice which I had learned, in a few brief moments, to recognize.

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"Dubravnik," said the princess, evidently in reply to a question concerning me. She uttered my name in a manner that thrilled me, too. Her companion, a man, responded:

"Bah! A friend of Prince Michael's, and therefore a friend of the czar's. It would be a dangerous experiment to sound him, princess."

"Perhaps; we will discuss it another time, Ivan. Shall we go in here?"

They had paused directly in front of the place where I was concealed, or rather, only half concealed, for they could have seen me if either had chanced to look in my direction. I could see them plainly. As it was, I nestled closer among the cushions and closed my eyes, expecting discovery; but for some reason — fate impelled, doubtless — they passed on a few steps, and entered another of the Turkish bowers which was the counterpart of the one that concealed me, and they seated themselves so near to me that I could have reached out one hand and touched them had it not been for the intervening screen of tapestry which partitioned the two enclosures. The few words I had overheard

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convinced me that I was not to listen to confidences of a sentimental nature; otherwise I should have made my presence known, and escaped. The sentence that had reached me, uttered by the man, suggested another reason for the tryst, and I therefore listened, convinced that it was my duty to do so.

CHAPTER IX

A SECRET INTERVIEW

I WONDERED if they would not detect the odor of my cigar, and thus discover that they were not alone in the garden, but the draft carried the smoke away from them; and then I became absorbed in what they were saying.

"I can give you only a few moments, Ivan," murmured the princess. "My guests will miss me. You should have come to me later."

"I know; but it was impossible. There is a meeting to-night, and our good friends are very anxious to hear something from you. When can you be present to tell them in your own words what you accomplished during your journey?"

The tone of the question was masterful, and unconsciously I resented it.

What right had any other man to address my princess in that manner? for already I found myself

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regarding her as *my* princess. I knew now that I had wandered into the garden solely for the purpose of being alone to think about her, and that in my short journeys up and down the paths, finally ending among the cushions of the Turkish bower, I had had her with me for a companion. You will discover by this statement that I was still mindful of her presence near me, even though I had left her in the drawing room while I went away alone; but it is always possible to conjure a personal presence if the mind is sufficiently intent upon it, and even though that presence be not physical, it is nevertheless real.

The tone of the man who was speaking with her in the adjoining bower was masterful, as I have said. More than that it was familiar. It was even intimate, I thought, and I was conscious of a silent rage when I heard it.

I sensed his words subconsciously, and yet I had thoroughly comprehended them. He had spoken of a meeting of their "very good friends" and I had no doubt to whom he referred; neither had I any doubt at the moment, that this man talking so

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confidentially with the princess, was one of the "marked" members of that rapidly widening group of persons whom my busily engaged employees were learning to know.

It was with a distinct shock, however, that I realized by virtue of the intimate manner of the man, that Zara de Echeveria must also be implicated with the nihilists, since he dared to speak to her so openly, so masterfully, and with such confident reliance upon the manner in which his communication would be received. Her reply convinced me sufficiently, had I required added conviction at that moment.

"I do not know," she said. "Say that I will send word to them in the usual way, and at the earliest opportunity. Say that I was entirely successful; that everything in Paris and Berlin is in the most excellent condition, and that nothing — absolutely nothing, you understand — must be done without my knowledge and permission."

"Our friends are becoming very impatient, Zara."

"Zara!" I unconsciously repeated the name after him, but it was under my breath, so that not a sound escaped me. Who could this man be who

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dared to address my princess by her given name, for in my secret soul she was my princess still, even though she had already said enough to convince me that she was an enemy to the czar whom I was serving.

"Let them. They must wait," she responded, with decision. "I will not be hurried. They are sworn to obey me. Tell them to await my pleasure. It is enough."

"There are some among them — you know who they are — who chafe under this restraint, Zara. I am afraid that they will get beyond your control unless something is done speedily."

"Let those who are loyal to me serve *them* as *they* would serve Alexander, if there is any sign of insubordination," was the haughty rejoinder. "Such is my order; and now, Ivan, you must go. Stay though! What of Jean Morét?"

"He is dead."

"Dead? Do you know that to be true?"

"No. He has disappeared from the palace, nobody knows whither. He has not gone to Siberia and our agents cannot find him in the city prisons.

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We have made every effort. Doubtless he betrayed himself in some manner and was quietly put out of the way."

"I will investigate the matter. He might have betrayed us, if caught and put to the torture. I can make Prince Michael tell me. Morét was more fool than knave, and he might have been induced to talk."

"He might have betrayed *us*; he would never betray *you*, Zara."

"I do not think so; and yet, it may be that I have gone too far with him. It is plain that I must make my prince talk."

Her prince! God! How the expression rankled! What revelations this overheard conversation was bringing to pass! From being in the seventh heaven of bliss, transported there by the few moments I had passed in the society of Zara, I was now plunged into the hell of doubt, uncertainty, and disillusionment. She spoke of "her prince" — and there could be no possible doubt that she referred to Prince Michael — as if he were already a mere puppet in her hands, to bow before her and fawn at her feet,

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as she willed it. And the prince, great and noble by instinct and nature, who had with such dignity admitted to me his love for her, was having his feelings and his affections played upon as a skilled performer touches the keys of a piano.

It was a new and unsuspected phase of Zara's character thus unfolded to me; and it was a most disquieting one. Standing with her as I had done among her guests, seated beside her as I had been for a few moments before I left her to go into the garden, I had believed in her as a devout worshipper believes in his deity, thinking no evil, believing that she could do no wrong, and placing her upon a pedestal that was high above all of the petty considerations of ordinary humanity. And then, as if to add to the sudden pain that was in my heart, this man who dared to address her by her given name, and whom she called Ivan, chuckled aloud as he remarked with unwonted intimacy:

"You have only to encourage him a little, Zara. The prince will talk. Never fear. Your power —"

"Encourage him!" It is impossible to describe the sense of outrage which Zara de Echeveria man-

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aged to include in the enunciation of those two words. Listening from my place among the cushions in the Turkish bower, I was conscious of a feeling of gladness that it was so; that she resented the tone of the man, as well as the words he had uttered; that she repudiated utterly the insinuation he had made. "You use the term as if you thought it were a pleasure to me to lead men on, simply because God gave me the beauty and the power. I hate it; oh, how I hate it! Suppose that Jean Morét is dead, who, then, in God's name is responsible for his death? I, I alone! Do you think that I am so heartless that I can look upon such things with no pang of self-reproach? I wish that I were old and ugly, fortuneless and an outcast—or dead. Then I would not be compelled to prostitute my beauty and my talents to conspire with a rabble of scoundrels and convicts who discuss murder and assassination as if they were pastimes."

"Hush! You do not realize what you say, Zara. Your own life—"

She laughed outright, interrupting him.

"My own life! Do you think I care for that?"

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I wish they would kill me and so end all this hateful, horrible scheming to murder and destroy."

"Hush, Zara! hush! You must not talk in that way."

"Not talk that way?" The princess laughed somewhat wildly, I thought, from my place of concealment, but still she made no sound that could have penetrated much farther than I was distant from their interview. "Not talk that way?" she repeated, and this time was silent for a spell, as if she were herself considering the reasons why she should not do so. There had been more of fright than menace, in the tone of the man called Ivan, when he cautioned her, and I could imagine how terrorized any member of the nihilistic fraternity must be if there were the least danger that disloyal thoughts of theirs might find lodgment in unsuspected places. "I will talk that way; I will talk as I please; nor you, nor any one, shall stand between me and my liberty of action and speech. What care I for all the murderers and assassins who form this terrible society of which we are members? Hear me? They could only swear my life away as they have done to others in many

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parallel cases. They could only destroy me; and Ivan, sometimes, upon my bended knees I pray for death. What matter would it be to me how death might come, so long as I am prepared to welcome it? I hate and loathe myself when I stop to consider all the contemptible acts I am compelled to perform, when I pause to realize the utter prostitution of self-respect I am forced to undergo, in order to carry on the plots of our 'good friends,' as you call them. Good friends, indeed! To whom, let me ask you, do they demonstrate the friendly spirit? Where can you point to a friendly act done by any one of them, unless it is to a prisoner already condemned, or to an assassin who is in danger of arrest? My own life?" she laughed again. "Ivan, were it not that I honestly believe that I can, by myself accomplish some great good in this undertaking, I would destroy that life with my own hands; for I tell you that it would be much easier to drive a poniard through my own heart, or to swallow a cup of poison, than it is for me to make sport of the affections of such men as the stately, generous Prince Michael, or that poor love-sick fool, Morét. Hush! don't

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say another word to me on the subject of warning, for it only angers me, and fills me with a contempt which I find it difficult to master."

"But, Zara, you must not talk so. I cannot listen."

"Then leave me. Go. I wish to be alone for a time before I return to the salon. Deliver my message, and also the order I gave you."

I heard no more after that, but I knew that he had gone, although there was no sound of his departure. Then I listened for the rustle of the princess' dress when she should move away. Presently it came. She sighed, then rose from the couch where she had been sitting, and I knew that she had stepped out upon the path. I closed my eyes, the better to think upon the remarkable revelations that had come to me as a result of that conversation. One, two, five, perhaps ten minutes I remained thus, turning the extraordinary incident over in my mind. But presently I opened them again, lazily and slowly at first, and then with a sudden start, for they encountered the form of the princess where she stood as motionless as a statue but with one arm extended

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holding back a palm leaf which half filled the entrance to my place of concealment.

God knows what impulse it was that had impelled her, in parting with her recent companion, to pause at the Turkish bower in which I was concealed, and so, to discover me. I had heard no sound whatever. I had supposed that both were gone. The shock induced by the revelations I had just overheard, the disillusionment I had experienced in regard to Princess Zara, had affected me more than I realized, and the act of closing my eyes and thinking it over had been the result of the same impulse which sends a frightened woman to her own room, to close the door behind her in order that she may be alone. By the act of closing my eyes, I shut out the world by which I was surrounded — that world which had now become so hateful to me because of the work I had to do. But nevertheless I looked up steadily into the eyes of the princess, wondering at the calmness and grace of her attitude, and amazed that she should not show more consternation than she did, at the discovery that there was a witness to her interview with the man Ivan. Save for a suggestion of



I LOOKED UP STEADILY INTO THE EYES OF THE PRINCESS

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pallor which had driven away the natural flushes from her cheeks, and perhaps for an added brightness, or rather a different brightness, to her eyes, she was the same as ever, although the smile which she now bestowed upon me seemed a bit constrained.

"You are not sleeping," she said, calmly, but with conviction. The remark was not a question; it was a statement.

"No," I replied, as calmly.

"And have not been asleep?"

"No."

"You heard?"

"Yes, princess, I heard."

She was silent, and minutes passed before she spoke again, so that I began to wonder if she had decided to say no more.

"Mr. Dubravnik," she said, and in English, "will you do me one favor in regard to this conversation you have overheard? Will you keep my confidence till to-morrow?"

I wondered again at the princess' coolness. Realizing the peril she was in, as she must unquestionably have done, it was strange that she could command

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herself so well as to remain perfectly in possession of all her faculties, in the face of such dire peril.

For a moment I hesitated. It was a very great favor that she asked of me so calmly; just how great a favor it was, she could not know; and yet there was no reason why I should not grant her request, being what I was and who I was. In that interval I wondered what this beautiful creature before me would think, or say, if she could have guessed that it was the chief of the most remarkable secret service bureau in the world whom she was addressing; if she could have guessed that the very man among all other men, whom she would least have thought of taking into her confidence, was the one before her who had listened to the conversation.

"Yes. I will do that," I replied, as deliberately as she had asked the question; and I watched her closely as I did so, holding myself well in hand, the while, in order that I might not instantly fall again under the spell of her fascinations.

"And come to me then? I will expect you at noon."

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"Yes, princess."

"I thank you, sir. And now, if you will give me your arm, we will return to the drawing room."

I could not help marveling at the wonderful self possession of the woman whose life, liberty, honor, happiness, and whose all, had been by means of the conversation I had overheard, placed utterly at my mercy. Even though I were really what she supposed me to be, an ordinary citizen, the danger was no less, for I had but to repeat what I had heard, to bring about an investigation which could result in only one way. Her composure was absolute as we walked side by side towards the house, nor did she once refer to the subject upon which we were both thinking so deeply. She was a shade paler than usual, but beyond that there was no sign that anything out of the ordinary had occurred; nor did she manifest any evidence of the nervous fear which would have prostrated most women in such a predicament.

Neither of us recurred to the subject that was uppermost in our minds. Indeed we were silent during

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the moment that was required to traverse the length of the garden, and to pass from it into the house where the company was assembled.

But I was conscious of a subtle change in the character of my feelings towards Zara de Echeveria. The fascination that had enthralled me a little while back, was tempered now by a wholesome dread of this riotously beautiful creature who could use her God-given feminine attributes to attain such deplorable ends. What had seemed to me to be a creature of utter loveliness, had now degenerated to a thing that was momentarily horrible, because what I had believed to be all purity, and all perfection, had suddenly been revealed as something that was akin to unmoral.

We parted at the door, she to cross the room and join a group of her guests who were clamoring for her while I loitered, with no purpose save to avoid comment on the apparent fact that the princess and I had been so long a time together in the garden. The prince joined me while I stood there. He was accompanied by a man whom he wished to introduce to me.

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"Ah, Dubravnik," he said. "I have been looking everywhere for you. Didn't know but you had gone. This is my friend Alexis Durnief. You've each heard me talk about the other, so you should be good friends."

"Captain Alexis Durnief?" I asked, shaking hands with him.

"The same," he replied. "Just returned from one of the far posts in Siberia, and I am very glad to be back here again. I haven't had an opportunity to greet the princess yet; you kept her in the garden so long."

I thought that he gave me a significant glance as he made the laughing remark, but as the princess herself joined us at that moment, I did not give it a second thought. He gave her his arm, and they went away together, leaving the prince and myself alone.

"I think, if you do not mind, I will go," I said. The house of Princess Zara had suddenly become hateful to me.

"What! At this hour? Why?" Prince Michael was amazed.

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"Oh, there is no reason, other than that I feel like it," I told him, shrugging my shoulders and trying to look bored.

"Then stay. Some of the best people are not here, yet. Or did your half hour in the garden upset you, Dubravnik?" He essayed a light laughter as he asked the question, but it had a hollow sound, nevertheless.

"Not at all," I assured him.

"I can assure you that it is an honor which the princess confers upon very few of her friends, and never on new acquaintances. You are the only exception I have ever known," he added.

"Indeed? We met in the garden by accident, and in reality were together not more than two minutes — the time that it takes to walk the length of it, so I do not feel as greatly honored as I might have done if she had gone there with me and had given me all that time —"

"I did not have an opportunity, for you never asked me to do so," said the soft tones of the princess immediately behind me; and as I turned she added:

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"but these rooms are suffocating, so if you will give me your arm now, Mr. Dubravnik, we will lead the way, and perhaps the others will follow. I know that the gentlemen are longing for an opportunity to smoke."

"Dubravnik was on the point of leaving us," the prince called after her. "You arrived just in time, princess. Perhaps you can persuade him to change his mind."

"Were you contemplating suicide, Mr. Dubravnik?" she asked laughing; but there was an undercurrent of gravity in her question which was deeply significant.

"Something very like it," I replied, as gravely, "since I was about to leave your presence."

"Supposing you to be serious" — and I felt that her hand unconsciously tightened its clasp upon my arm as we moved away — "would it not be better for me to do the deed, than for you?"

"I am afraid that the supposition is altogether too foreign to my nature for me to entertain it, princess."

We had entered the garden, and a throng of guests

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were trooping after us. I glanced down at my companion, and saw that she was regarding me rather anxiously through her lashes.

"Suicide is the only solution for all problems at once," she said.

"Pardon me; it is the solution for only one."

"Only one? What is that?"

"Moral cowardice."

"But there may be circumstances where it offers the only means of escape from an alternative that is infinitely worse, Mr. Dubravnik." We were in the act of passing one of the little side paths, and I drew her into it, noticing that there was just a suggestion of resistance from my companion when I did so; but it was only for an instant. Then, as I paused abruptly underneath one of the green shaded globes, she added, as though she knew that I perfectly understood her: "I have really been considering the subject quite seriously."

I looked down at her. The green hue of the light above us seemed to have transformed her into a spirit. It had changed the color of her dress, of her hair, and it had touched her cheeks as with a

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magic wand which softened and heightened every feature. Instead of transforming her into something that she was not, I was convinced that it brought her back from what she was not to what she really was. At all events, I realized that she was in deadly earnest.

In that moment I felt again all the spell of this woman's charm as she stood before me, beneath the glow of that shaded light, looking up into my face with her beautiful eyes now widened with serious concern, with her full, lithe, graceful body pulsing with life so close to mine, while she talked calmly, and seriously I knew, too, of destroying it by her own act.

What a place to talk of suicide, there, in the midst of that oriental garden, voluptuous with a thousand unspoken suggestions, laden with the perfume of flowers, glowing with the many colored lights that illumined it, rustling as with the sound of hidden insects as the gowns of gorgeously bedecked women brushed against the growing things! Over our heads, beyond the glass roof, the storm still howled, although with less violence, and the contrast

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seemed strangely in keeping with the condition of my own mind, outwardly so calm and composed, yet torn by the thousand conflicting emotions that were induced by the proximity of this entrancing creature, and the knowledge of what her fate, and therefore mine, must inevitably be.

CHAPTER X

SENTENCED TO DEATH

TO what lengths our conversation on that subject might have gone I will never know, for at that instant we were interrupted by Prince Michael, who was seeking my companion. I had only time to utter one admonition:

"Extremities should never be resorted to until the necessity arises, nor is it wise for one to burn a bridge until it has been crossed; besides, you have an engagement at noon to-morrow which should be kept."

"Which will be kept," she murmured, in reply. Then Prince Michael came upon us.

The prince reported that many of the guests were calling for their hostess and so I utilized the opportunity to take my leave, which I did notwithstanding the protests of my friend. He told me to make use of his *sanka*, which would return and wait for

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him after it had deposited me at my door; but when I left the house the storm had lulled almost to stopping and as the distance was not great I decided to walk. That decision very nearly cost me my life, and very materially altered my views regarding the princess as well as my intentions concerning her. As I passed through the house on my way to the street I met Captain Durnief, who stopped me for a moment.

"I feel like a boy who is dressed in his first trousers," he said to me with a laugh. "You cannot comprehend the delight of returning to this place after the experiences I have undergone in Siberia, for even the life of an officer there is little better than that of a convict. I shall have the pleasure of meeting you often, Dubravnik, for I understand that you are frequently at the palace."

"Shall you be there?" I asked.

"Yes; I am detailed to the palace guard. Have you enjoyed the evening here?"

"Hugely."

"Of course you have met the princess frequently."

Durnief had a way of half closing his eyes when

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he talked. He evidently intended it to give him the appearance of indifference, but it had a directly opposite effect upon me, for it was palpably a mask to conceal the intensity of his gaze — to hide the interest he felt in whatever he uttered at the time.

"No," I said "this is my first acquaintance with her."

"Then you should consider yourself greatly honored."

"I do." Possibly my monosyllabic reply was even shorter than it needed to have been for he gestured an almost imperceptible shrug, and hesitated while he again bestowed upon me that half quizzical glance which seemed to conceal a sneer, or which might have been intended to suggest that I should have understood some obscure meaning behind his words; but I chose not to see it. Then, as we shook hands at parting he honored me by a pressure of his thumb which Morét had taught me to understand as the very faintest kind of an interrogation. I have already mentioned it as often given by a nihilist to one whom he believes may be one with him. It was so faint and so uncertain that it might easily have

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been mistaken for an accident, and like the glance I permitted it to pass unnoticed.

It was about half past two in the morning when I emerged from the house. The air was exhilaratingly cold, and the storm was nearly past. The clouds which had hovered over the city all the preceding day and night were still in evidence, however, so that the streets between the widely separated lamps were dark and lonely. The distance I had to go was something more than a mile, and I had traversed more than half of it and was in the act of turning a corner when directly beside me, and quite near, I saw a flash, was conscious of a loud report, and felt that I had received a sharp and telling blow on my head.

When I was again conscious of my surroundings I was in my own rooms, while beside the couch upon which I had been placed were my valet, a physician, and my faithful coadjutor, Tom Coyle.

"Hello, Tom; what's up?" I asked, feebly.

"Faith, you'd have been up higher than you care to go just yet, Dannie, if I hadn't been drivin' wan av me own cabs this night, owin' to the sudden death

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av wan av me min," he replied. "The doctor says the bullet didn't hurt ye much, but ye'd have been froze stiff if I hadn't found ye whin I did."

"Tell me about it," I commanded.

"Divil a bit there is to tell, more than I've already said. I was goin' to the princess' afther me fare, whin I heard a shot. I wint where I heard the sound and found you. That's all I know."

"Where did the bullet strike me?"

"Foreninst yer head, Dannie. Ye'll have a bald spot there, I'm thinkin'. But it only broke the skin an' hit ye a welt that made ye see stars this cloudy night. Now I'm goin'. Maybe I'll have a report for you whin I come back. There's snow enough. The blackguard ought to have left some tracks."

There is a spot on the back of the head where a very light blow will bring about insensibility, and it was exactly on that spot that the bullet had struck me, taking off a little hair and skin, but otherwise doing no damage; but I could not help connecting the attempt on my life with the experiences of the night; in other words, with the woman whose guest I had been and whose secrets I had overheard. I had

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cherished a feeling of the utmost charity for her until that moment, but the "accident" changed all that, for I had not a doubt in my mind that it was by her order that somebody had made the attempt to assassinate me.

After a few hours' sleep I felt as well as ever, and before the time to make my call upon the princess I paid a visit to Jean Morét. I had neglected to say that the only letter he had sent away since his imprisonment was one to his mother, from whom he had received a reply addressed through one of my agents, and in explanation of his reluctance to send more, he had said: "It is better that the world should think me dead." Concerning the woman for whose sake he became a nihilist, he never spoke. But the experiences I had passed through at the home of the princess, the preceding night, made me wise concerning the identity of the woman who had influenced him. Indeed I had had it from her own lips that she had played with this man, even as she had hoodwinked the prince. What the relations between her and Morét might have been, in what manner they had been brought together in the past, and by what

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transformation of individuality he had dared to raise his eyes to a princess, I could not even conjecture. There was no doubt, however, that she had used him for one of the marionettes in her puppet show; and now he, poor devil, because of it, was safer in a prison cell, and no doubt happier, too, than he would have been at liberty.

I wanted the man to talk and to talk about her, and I must confess what I did not at the moment realize that my desire found its source more in personal resentment against any confidential passages that may have taken place between those two, than in my plain duty to the cause I was serving.

There are many kinds of jealousy, and each kind will find its expression through innumerable channels. If I had been charged with jealousy at that moment, I would have repudiated the suggestion with scorn and contempt; and yet I was jealous.

I had thought rather deeply upon this approaching conversation with Morét, while on my way to interview him, but I was no nearer to a determination regarding what I should say to him, when I entered the room he occupied in the prison, than I had been when

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the idea first occurred to me. Now when I entered the room where he was imprisoned, I said:

"Why is it, Morét, that you have never taken any further advantage of my promise that you could write and send letters?"

"There is no one with whom I care to communicate," he replied.

"Not even with the princess?" I asked the question idly, watching him from between half closed lids.

"With what princess?" he asked calmly, and without a trace of surprise or resentment in his perfectly trained countenance.

"Zara de Echeveria," I said, coldly.

"I do not know her."

"No! She knows you."

"Indeed? It is an honor to be known by a princess."

"I have it from her own lips that she is responsible for your presence in the palace."

"Then surely there is no need to interview me on the subject." He was thoroughly my equal in this play-of-words.

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"She was told in my presence that you were dead. Would you not like to hear what she said in reply?" I asked him.

"If you care to tell me."

"She said that it was better so; that if you lived you would have betrayed all your friends — including her; that in fact you were more fool than knave."

"She is not complimentary; but as I do not know her, it makes no difference." Nothing could have been more composed than Morét's manner was.

"You will not discuss her?"

"I would if I could, but I do not know her, monsieur."

"Well, Morét, I like your loyalty, even to one who has used you as a mere tool, and who is now rejoiced to learn that you are dead, and out of her way, with the dangerous secrets you possess. I am going to her as soon as I leave you; perhaps she will talk about you again."

Morét stared at me unwinkingly, but with a countenance that was like marble in its intensity. I knew that he was suffering, and that my words were the cause of his agony. I knew that I was prodding

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him deeply, and severely, thrusting the iron into his soul with as little compunction as a Mexican *charo* exerts when he "cinches" a heavily burdened *burro*. But I was doing it with malice prepense, and I was doing it for a purpose.

I wished, somehow, to compel this man to talk freely with me about the princess, and yet all the time I was reluctant in my own soul to have him do it. During that interval Morét was greater than I; more chivalrous than I; for he remained loyal to his duty towards her, as he saw it, in spite of the terrible accusation I had made against her womanliness, and notwithstanding all the insinuations I had put forward, respecting her utter disregard and contempt for him.

"Perhaps she will do so," he said; "that is, if she knows aught to say of me."

He was silent for a moment after that, and I waited, knowing that I had tried this man to the utmost point of his mental endurance.

Presently he raised his eyes again to mine, and said:

"Mr. Dubravnik, at the very beginning of our ac-

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quaintance, when you made a prisoner of me in one of the rooms of the suite you were to occupy in the palace, I told you that I had gone into this business for the love of a woman, and it was tacitly, if not literally agreed between us at that time, that the woman's personality and name should form no part of our future discussions. You have chosen, at this time, to mention a princess, to whom you give the name of Zara de Echeveria, and I have told you that I know no such person; that the name means nothing to me. What you may surmise, Mr. Dubravnik, can have no effect upon me, or upon your relations with me, or mine with you. So now I tell you once again, that while I am perfectly willing to believe myself to be morally free to discuss with you all phases of nihilism, I will not discuss this woman you have named, *or any other woman.*"

He bowed his head and I could see beads of sweat upon his forehead which betrayed the mental anguish he was undergoing. I knew that it was far worse than physical torture, and as there was nothing to gain by prolonging it, and nothing more to be said, I withdrew.

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At the end of another half hour I was announced to the princess.

She received me in a diminutive bower of Oriental luxury. Her decorative tastes were decidedly Eastern and lavishly extravagant. She knew how to arrange a room with the object of stealing away a man's reserve. There is something about the atmosphere of well chosen surroundings which intoxicates judgment and murders discretion — which bars reason at the threshold and generates madness of thought and deed beyond it. A Solon in the princess' drawing room might become a puppet in her boudoir; in that fascinating atmosphere a Jove would have degenerated to a Hermes, or Mars have cast away his sword and shield for the wings of Apollo. To enter it, was like awaking from a vivid dream of battle to find the soft arms of love around you, and to feel the lethargy of infinite content. Add to this the personality of the Princess Zara, her half hesitating smile of welcome in which pleasure and dread were equally mingled; suffuse her face with a quick blush, and instantly replace it with a touch of pallor; render her

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manner with a suggestion of hauteur, softened by a gesture of timidity and doubt; listen to her voice, low-toned and infinitely calm yet vibrating in a minor chord of uncertainty and dread; feel the clasp of her hand, cold when it touches yours, yet instantly thrilling you with a glow induced by the contact, and — remain thoroughly master of yourself if you can. Retain, if you have the strength to do so, the opinions you had formed, the judgments you have passed. If you succeed, you are a giant; if you fail, you are just what I was — a man, and human.

"You are punctual, and I am grateful," she murmured. "If you had been late —"

All the hardness I had felt before returned to me then.

"If I had been late you would have known the reason, princess," I said.

"No; but I should have feared it."

"I would have been dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes; but, unfortunately, the attempt upon my life did not succeed, thanks to Fate and poor marksmanship."

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"The attempt on your life! I do not understand."

I turned my head so that she could see where the plaster hid the wound made by the bullet of the would-be assassin.

"A better marksman would have compelled me to break my engagement, princess," I said.

She extended one hand and rested a finger lightly upon the wound, as though she intended the mere touch to heal it. With the other hand she gently turned my face towards hers; yet she did it in a way that was devoid of intimacy. Somehow she changed what might have been suggestive of familiarity, into a gesture of womanly tenderness; and there was undoubtedly horror in her eyes, and a flash of angry resentment, too.

"You think that I am responsible for this?" she asked, releasing me and stepping backward.

I bowed, but made no reply.

Impulsively, she crossed the room, and from the floor, where she had doubtless thrown it after reading, secured a crumpled wad of paper, and after

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straightening and smoothing it, gave it into my hand.

"Read," she said.

" 'Our interview in the garden was overheard by two persons beside ourselves,' " I read, aloud.

" 'One of them, fortunately, was a friend; the other may not keep the engagement made with you.' "

"It is from Ivan," she said. "It is because I received that note that I would have been anxious if you had been detained. It did not occur to me to doubt that you would be prompt until I read that. I did not doubt you, Mr. Dubravnik. I might have killed myself, but I would not have — ah! To think that you could deem me capable of such an act as that!"

"I did not princess, until — well, there was no other theory. At all events, I have changed my mind. Who is Ivan?"

"My brother."

"I did not know you had a brother."

"Naturally, since his existence is forgotten. He was sentenced to Siberia when he was sixteen. Now he is thought to be dead, but he escaped, and is

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here. He must have brought some one with him last night — somebody who listened to everything. Do you know what that note means, my friend? It means that you have been sentenced to death. It means that the nihilists will surely take your life; and oh, my God, there is no escape! ”

CHAPTER XI

FOR THE SAKE OF THE CZAR

WHEN one is sentenced to death by the nihilists in Russia it sends a cold shiver down the back, no matter how brave and self-reliant one may be, for those fanatics have an uncomfortable way of carrying out such decrees to the bitter end. However, I smiled and assured the princess that I thought I could find a way to avoid the consequences of my eavesdropping, and then awaited the moment when she would say more. For a long time she was silent, and during it I studied her carefully, for she was the most complex puzzle that I had ever encountered in the shape of a woman. I had heard enough to know that she was not only a conspirator against the life of the emperor, but that she was ostensibly if not really, the leader among her fellow conspirators; or if not *the* leader, then a leader. I had heard her talk glibly of assassination

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and death, and I had heard her deplore in mental anguish the part she was forced to play in the game of Russian politics. In one moment I had believed her to be a heartless schemer, a murderess, and one who was devoid of compassion; and in the next I was forced to the conjecture that she was a victim of circumstances, and that she had no love for or sympathy with the cause she advocated. Now, as I watched her, the same emotions succeeded each other in my judgment of her character, and finally I summed them all up in the decision that she was a being who was swayed by impulses. There are seeming paradoxes which will explain just what my conclusions were concerning Zara de Echeveria. She was deliberately impulsive; calculatingly reckless; systematically chaotic. The warm, Southern blood in her veins impelled her to deeds which were rendered thrice effective by reason of the fact that she applied to them the calculating coolness and method of her Russian ancestors. Hence the paradox.

Presently she raised her eyes to mine.

"Dubravnik," she said slowly, "there is one way of escape for you; and there is only one."

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"What is that?" I asked.

"You must become a nihilist."

"I had thought of that," I returned coolly. For, indeed, I had thought of it, although not at all from the motive she understood me to mean.

"You had thought of it?" she cried. "Do you say that earnestly, or only to lead me on?"

"Was it not this very point that you were discussing with your brother when you entered the garden last night, princess?" I asked, recalling the mention of my name between them at that time.

"Yes; I had said to him that you were the kind of a man who should be added to our ranks. I think you must have heard his reply."

"Yes."

"Do you know what nihilism is, Mr. Dubravnik?"

"No. I have always regarded it as a dangerous organization; morally dangerous, I mean. You must not think that I have considered joining it for any other reason than to place myself in a position where I will feel that it is my duty to respect the confidence that I stole from you, rather than to betray it."

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"Then you never had such a thought until you knew I was a nihilist?"

"Never."

"And you would join us for my sake?"

"No."

"For whose, then?"

"For the sake of the czar."

"Ah! You would join only to betray them all into the hands of the police! That is what you mean."

Zara leaped to her feet. Her whole manner underwent a change and for the instant she was completely dominated by a furious scorn which found its expression in every single pose of the attitude she assumed. Her eyes blazed with the sudden anger she felt at me, brought about more by the thought which came to her that I, whom she had stooped to admire, was nothing but a spy. A torrent of words rushed to her lips, at least her appearance was that she was on the point of denouncing me most bitterly; but I raised a hand and interrupted her, bending slightly forward, and speaking with sharp decision,

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although coolly, and with studied conciseness of expression.

"No," I said. "If I should become a nihilist, it would be to protect the emperor, not to betray your friends."

Again her entire manner underwent a change. As if she thoroughly believed me, the fury of scorn left her eyes, the angry glitter of them ceased, the rigidity of her attitude relaxed, and I saw that she was regarding me with an expression of wondering amazement, in which pity, and longing, not unmixed with admiration, were dominant. She was silent for the moment, but she kept her eyes fixed upon mine, and gradually they began to glow with that fire of enthusiasm which no argument can ever hope to overcome. Looking upon her I realized that if she were not a nihilist at heart, she had become one by reason of some great mental cataclysm through which she had passed. I believed then, and I was to know later, that I was correct, and that nothing at present apparent could swerve her from her set purpose, or could influence her against the cause she had under-

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taken, and was now upholding, so valiantly. The spasms of remorse that rushed upon her at times, and such feelings of repugnance as I had heard her express in the garden, were only *oases* in the desert of her perverted judgment, engendered in her very soul by some terrible calamity through which she had personally passed, or regarding which she had been a close observer. When she spoke again, it was with low-toned softness, and she glided a step or two nearer to me, raising her beautiful eyes, now softened to an appealing quality, and clasping her hands in front of her with a gesture of suppliant helplessness that was almost overwhelming.

"Do you think that we have no wrongs to right?" she demanded.

"I think you have many, princess, judging from your standpoint; but you cannot right them by committing greater ones. Nothing can dignify or enoble deliberate assassination, or wanton, cruel, secret murder. The nihilists are assassins, murderers, cut-throats."

"You do not know! You do not know!"

"Perhaps not."

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"Having heard what you did — knowing, as you do, my secret — unwilling as I know you are, to betray me, what do you propose, Mr. Dubravnik?"

I replied deliberately.

"I have thought of joining the nihilists, but I have reconsidered the question as impracticable. Therefore, I have decided that you must leave Russia."

"I? Leave Russia? Ordered away by you?"

"Yes, princess."

She laughed wildly, and again this creature of impulse underwent one of her lightning changes of which I had seen so many evidences. She was indignant now, made so by offended pride, because of the affront my words had put upon her social status. She, a princess, high in place, to be ordered out of her own country by a man who was a stranger to her, was unprecedented.

"Do you think that I am a weak thing to be ordered about like that by a man whom I never met until last night? Beware, sir, lest you make me regret that the bullet did not do its work more effectively. I am a princess; I have wealth, power, influ-

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ential friends; do not think that the czar would believe what you would say, when he heard the story that I could tell him."

I shrugged my shoulders carelessly. It was part of my purpose to anger her even to the point of madness, for in that way alone could I hope to draw her out to the point or revealing herself to me truly. And besides, I was again falling under that fascination which exerted such strange and compelling power over me.

"If I believed you to be sincere in what you say now, it would make my unfortunate duty much more simple," I said.

"Your duty! What is your duty? To betray a woman?"

"Precisely that."

"And you would do that? *You?*"

"If the alternative fails, yes."

Again she rose from the couch upon which she had relaxed. She came and stood quite near to me, and with infinite scorn, impossible to describe, she said slowly:

"I think our interview is at an end, Mr. Du-

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bravnik, for there is evidently nothing to be gained by it. I much prefer to choose my friends among those whom you call assassins, than from frequenters of the palace — if the others are like you."

I rose also, and bowed coldly.

"As you will, princess," I said. "I promised to keep your secret twenty-four hours. You have still ten hours in which to do one of three things to obviate the necessity that is now upon me, of betraying you."

"Indeed!" haughtily.

"The easiest one will be for you to notify me of your intention to depart from the country. The second, quite as effective, was suggested by yourself last night when we talked of suicide. The third will perhaps prove more congenial than either of the others; you can have me murdered." I bowed, and started towards the door, but she barred the way before I could reach it.

"You shall not go!" she cried, extending her arms as if to bar the way against my exit, and again her speaking countenance betrayed the impulse within her. This time it was terror.

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"No? Is your brother Ivan here to complete the work so badly begun, princess?" I purposely rendered my question insolently offensive.

For a moment she gazed at me in horror; then, with a sob in her throat, she stepped aside and pointed towards the door.

"Go," she said. "I should not have detained you." But as I was about to take her at her word she burst into a passion of tears. At the same instant she leaped towards me, and seizing me with both hands, drew me back again to the middle of the floor.

"No — no — no — no!" she cried. "You shall not go! Don't you know that you would be shot down at the door of my house, or at best before you had gone a hundred feet away from it? Have you forgotten that your appointment with me to-day was known by those who have decided upon your death? Will you force me to acquiesce in your murder, even though you believe me capable of committing it?"

I knew that what she said was undoubtedly true, for I had neglected my usual caution in not provid-

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ing for an emergency of this kind; but I pretended to be incredulous.

"Yet I cannot remain here indefinitely, princess," I said.

"It is the only way to save your life. If you leave here before I have seen those who would kill you, you will not live fifteen minutes after my door closes behind you. Oh, I beseech you, take the oath; promise me that you will take the oath, and let me go and tell my friends that you will do so."

She was pleading with me now, with her hands supplicatingly extended, and with an expression of such utter terror in her face because of the calamity which threatened me, that my soul was for a moment moved to pity for this woman, who could pass through so many phases of emotion in so short a period of time. But nevertheless it was not my purpose to betray that pity, then. I had still to draw her out, more and more; there was still much to learn of this complex woman, so beautiful and so noble, who yet could find a sufficient excuse to engage in such nefarious practices.

I have thought since that I was playing with my-

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self, as well as with her, at that time; that I was making a study of Zara's soul, rather than of her character; I have believed, and I now believe, that even at that moment I was madly in love with this half wild creature, outwardly so tamed, and yet inwardly more than half a barbarian, with the blood of her Tartar ancestors on the one side coursing hotly in her veins. I wanted to know her. I wanted to bring her out of herself. My own intuition recognized, and was making the most of a boundless and limitless sympathy that existed between us two, although I was not at the time conscious of the fact; a sympathy that found voice in Zara's heart as well as in mine, and which needed but a touch, as of the spark to grains of powder, to fire it into a blaze of love so absolute as to sweep every other consideration from its path. My heart recognized hers, and I was subconsciously aware that hers recognized mine. It may be that I was playing two parts with her at that moment, the one being that of my ostensible character, as an agent of the czar; the other asserting itself as plain Dan Derrington, an American gentleman who was very much in love.

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"Do you suppose, even then, that they would believe you, and spare me?" I asked, with unconcealed irony, forcing myself even against my will, to render my question bitterly offensive.

"Yea, oh, yes! I would give myself as hostage for your honor. My life would be forfeited, too, if you should not keep the oath."

I hesitated. The opportunity was an alluring one in a way, for it would render the entire organization like an open book to me. But more than all else was the communion of interest that would thus be created between this peerless woman and me. Still, there were other things to be considered. The danger I would thus incur might render impotent the entire fabric that I had constructed with so much care; and truth to tell I could not bring myself to the point of utilizing a woman's confidence in order ultimately to betray her and her friends.

"I cannot take the oath, princess," I said, calmly.

"Think! think!" she exclaimed.

"I have thought. I cannot do it."

"Sit down again, Mr. Dubravnik. There is no danger as long as you remain here. I wish to tell

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you something. I want you to know why I am a nihilist; then, perhaps, you may be of a different opinion."

I obeyed her and she resumed her position on the couch, but her entire manner had undergone another change. The contempt, the scorn, the anger had all died out of her face which now assumed a retrospective expression and when she next addressed me her eyes had in them a dreamy, far away light, as though she were living in the past while she recited the strange tale that thrilled me as nothing else ever had, or ever has done.

"I have heard," she began, "that you yourself have seen some of the horrors of Siberia, but I doubt it. I do not even believe that you are a Russian, and to be perfectly frank I do not believe that your name is Dubravnik. I am of the opinion — and I did not think of it until since the commencement of this interview — that you are not what you seem to be, and that your mission in Russia is in some way connected with the Government police; that you are more than a passive enemy of nihilism — that you are, in short, an active one. If I am right there

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exists all the more reason why I must appeal to your manhood, your honor, your sense of justice, to your bravery and chivalry. Who are you, Mr. Dubravnik?"

"I am Daniel Derrington, an American, in the service of the czar."

"And therefore connected with the police."

"No. The police do not know me, save as you know me; not even the terrible Third Section."

She scarcely noticed my confession so absorbed was she by the mere thought of the story she was about to relate.

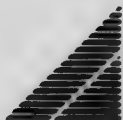
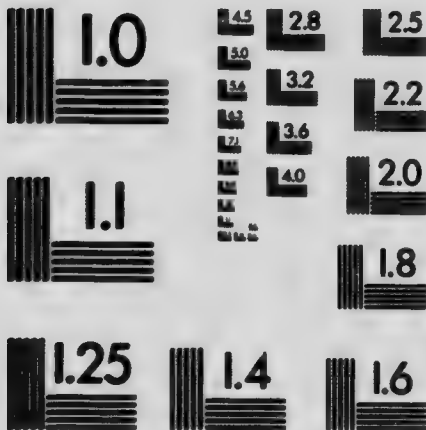
Her eyes were turned towards the window, her hands clasped tightly together in her lap, her chin was raised, and she seemed to be looking into the past as one might look upon a picture hanging against the wall, observing every detail of it minutely, and yet conscious only of the whole.

"Fancy yourself, a Russian of noble birth, an officer in the army, a favorite at court, the possessor of almost unlimited wealth and happy beyond the dreams of heaven," she said, dreamily. "Search your memory for the picture of a beautiful girl —



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PRINCESS ZARA

she was only a girl, not yet twenty, when my story begins — and make this one of whom I speak thrice more beautiful than the picture you delineate. She was your sister. She *is* your sister. You are her brother in the story I shall relate to you. You two are fatherless and motherless; you are all that is left of your family, once famous, and seemingly destined through you to become so again. You are a favorite with the czar, and your sister is the pet of the royal family. Your influence at court is unlimited. You are on the summit of the wave of favor and popularity. Have you drawn the picture?"

"I endeavor to do so, princess."

"You and Yvonne — she had a French name — reside in the same palace where your fathers lived before you. Your sister is the idol of your heart. You worship her with such devotion that it becomes a maxim quoted by mothers to their sons. You idealize her, and are proud of her; and she is worthy of it all. Ah, sir, follow me with care, for the story will touch you, I believe, as nothing else could do."

Zara left the couch and crossed to the window, where she stood staring through it for a long period

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of time, so silent, so still, so like a statue in her attitude, that I beheld her with something like awe, while I trembled with eagerness for her to speak again. I must admit that the story she had begun to relate had thus far made no impression upon me, and that it was only the voice of the woman I loved, and the changing expressions of its tone, and her beautiful countenance, which attracted me then. She was so wholly lovable in every attribute of her being; and now, absorbed as she was by the retrospective consideration of the tale she had begun to relate, and because her manner was entirely impersonal, she became even more compelling in her fascinations for me. I forgot, for the moment, that she was a Russian princess and a nihilist, and remembered only the one absorbing fact that she was a woman. My duties in St. Petersburg and the character I had assumed in fulfilling them, the city itself and all my surroundings, the environment of the moment and all that went with it, faded from my mental view, and left us two there, utterly alone in a world of our own, self created by my own conceit of the moment.

I do not know what impulse it was that brought

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me to my feet with a sudden start of resolve, but I had taken three or four strides toward her, with arms outstretched to seize her lithe form in my embrace, and to crush her against me in a burst of passion which I found myself no longer able to control, when I was startled into motionlessness and silence by a sudden cry from Zara, who turned about and faced me for an instant, and who then seized me by the arm and drew me to the window, pointing into the street as she did so.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN LOVE WAS BORN

THE streets of St. Petersburg, the city itself, nihilism, Russia, the czar had ceased to exist for me, however. Whatever she may have seen upon the street that had brought that startled cry to her lips, and had made her turn about and grasp my arm, had also brought into her countenance an expression of such overwhelming and overpowering concern for me, that I knew with a perfect knowledge in that instant, that Zara loved me.

Have you ever been swayed by an impulse that is utterly beyond your control, and before which all other considerations degenerate to such utter insignificance as not to exist at all?

It was such an one that controlled me then.

As she drew me toward the window, and would have directed my gaze through it, her own eyes held unflinchingly to mine, and mine held hers with a

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compelling power which she did not seek to resist, and could not have controlled, even if she had made the effort.

Whatever it may have been, out there in the street, that had alarmed her, she forgot it, and my arms were around her, her lithe, sinuous, pulsing body was crushed madly against my own, and our lips had met before either of us realized it. We had mutually recognized the strange and overwhelming instinct of love, that had asserted its control over both at the self-same instant. I forgot the world, the flesh and the devil, the czar, Russia, and nihilism, and she forgot even that uppermost terror that was tearing at her heart, in that supreme moment of the rapturous recognition of love.

We were unconscious of the fact that we were standing directly before the window, where we must have been for the moment in full view of persons passing in the street; we had forgotten everything, save each other.

We were both silent; there was no occasion for words; our souls were speaking to each other in a language of their own, God-given and complete,

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which leaves nothing to be understood, which comprehends all things.

In such supreme moments as that one was, heart speaks to heart with a complete understanding which passeth all human knowledge, and which can be understood only by the two who are most concerned, and by God, who created such impulses.

Presently we were back again beside the low divan. She was seated upon the edge of it, and I was beside her, with one knee on the floor, clasping both her hands in one of mine, while the other still encircled her body, holding her tightly against me in that rhapsody of love which overawes all sense of understanding.

Her head rested lightly upon my shoulder; stray tresses of her hair brushed against my temple and my cheek; her half-parted lips, glowing like newly opened rose-buds, never attained a distance of more than an inch from mine, and for the most part they were together, as lightning conductors of every thrill that pulsed through her being and mine.

When our lips were not in contact, our eyes were; they were gazing into the utmost depths of each

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other's soul, reading and understanding all that was mutually expressed, charmed and fascinated by the beauteous panoramic scenes which flittered in love-phantoms past our prophetic vision.

"My love! my love!" she murmured over and over again, as if it were all she could utter, and as if with the use of that expression all things were said and done; and I replied as inevitably and comprehensively.

It sounds inane enough in the telling of it, but meaningless phrases and abrupt expressions may, at certain moments in our lives, express everything.

Time became a blank; the world was blotted out; existence was only an incident; we, ourselves, with our bodies, our energies, our capabilities, had become mere atoms in the immensity of that greatest of all God's creations, Love.

There were murderers waiting in the street to do me to death; I thanked God for their presence, since because of it, Zara had been brought to the confession and expression of her love for me. She was a nihilist queen and she had played with the affections of men in order to stupefy them to her pur-

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poses, as demanded by the cause she served; but I also thanked God for that, because its consideration and my deep resentment had made plain to me the real power and passion of this abundantly glorious woman, now swayed by only one impulse, love for me.

But, however enthralling they may be, all impulses must have an end. However complete may be love's expression, there is a limit to its continuance; I mean that silent form of expression which proclaims itself only in soul communion.

It was a period of almost utter unconsciousness, since we were both conscious of only one thing while it lasted; but the reaction came at last while she was still relaxed in my embrace, and while yet the mystifying magic induced by contact with her, enveloped me, body and soul.

"Zara," I said, half whispering the word now so unutterably sweet to me, "you will leave Russia now — with me?"

The question brought us both to our senses, with a start, and my princess drew away from me a little, and said, with a whimsical smile:

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"A little while ago, my love, you ordered me to leave Russia, alone; now you order me away again, but under guard. I think I will obey you in this last order you have given me. Whenever you will it, I will go."

"And leave behind you all that you have hitherto thought so much about, Zara?" I asked, brought back by her statement to a realization of the conditions by which we were surrounded. She replied without hesitation, and with a finality that was complete:

"Yes."

Ah, what maps of the world have been changed by that word yes. What histories have been written because of its utterance, even in a whispered tone, as hers was then.

"And your nihilists?" I asked her, still intent upon an even more complete capitulation on her part.

"Yes," she repeated.

"And your brother? The cause you have served so intently? The purpose of your life? Everything, Zara?"

"Yes," she said a third time, and still with that

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same emphasis of finality which could not be misunderstood, and for which there was no qualification.

I was silent and so was she; but after a little I heard her murmuring in a tone so low that it seemed as if I scarcely heard it, notwithstanding the fact that every word was quite distinct.

"I will leave everything for you, my love, for you are all the world to me. There is nothing else now, but you. Nihilism and the cause it upholds, has sunk into utter insignificance, and has become a mere point in the history of my life, like a punctuating period that is placed at the end of a written sentence. Nihilists, great and small, have become mere atoms in the mystery of creation, and they can have no further influence upon my life. The czar of all the Russias is no more a personage to me now, than the merest black dwarf of central Africa, and Russia itself has diminuated to a mere island in the sea of eternity, a speck on the map of the infinite creation. You, Dubravnik —" She paused there and smiled into my eyes with an inimitable gesture of tenderness as she reached upward with her right hand and

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brushed back the hair from my temples — "I think I shall always call you Dubravnik. The name is yours, as I have known you, and as Dubravnik you are mine, as I am yours."

My reply to this was not a spoken word, and it needs no explanation.

"You, Dubravnik," she continued from the point where she so sweetly interrupted herself, "have become the universe to me, now. You are the infinite space which comprehends all."

It was sweet to hear her express herself so; sweeter still to know, that comprehensive as it was, it went but a little way toward explaining all that she would have liked to say; and sweetest of all to realize that she also exactly expressed my thought toward her, and that she knew she did so.

There was a long silence after that, broken only by her breathing, by a murmured word of caress, by a gesture of endearment or an occasional sigh; but I brought it to an end presently by asking a question which brought her out of her reverie with a start of affright.

"What was it, Zara, that you saw through the

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window when —" I did not complete the sentence. It was not necessary. She understood me instantly and with the understanding there returned to her a realization of all the terrors by which we were at that moment surrounded. We could love each other with a rhapsodical completeness, in perfect security, so long as we remained together inside that room; but beyond the walls of Zara's palatial home death stalked grimly, waiting, waiting, waiting, for the moment to strike.

She withdrew from my embrace, slowly and tentatively, but surely, until we no longer touched each other, and she gazed appealingly into my eyes while the flush of love forsook her cheeks and brow, giving place to a pallor of uncertainty and dread for me.

"I had forgotten," she murmured.

"Then continue to forget, my Zara," I whispered.

"No, we must not forget; we must remember."

She raised her hand and pointed toward the window.

"Out there, Dubravnik, death waits for you. I had forgotten. I had forgotten."

With a start she gained her feet and stood for a moment palpitatingly uncertain, clasping and unclasp-

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ing her hands, while her bosom rose and fell in this stress of an utterly new emotion.

One whom she loved was threatened, now. The maternal instinct of womankind is never more prominent than when it is exercised in the protection of the man she loves, and who is destined to be the father of her offspring. It is a grand and a noble sentiment, and no man lives who will ever comprehend it; but when a man loves as I loved then, he can appreciate its fullness, even though he may not understand it; he can recognize its existence and presence, even though it would be impossible for him to define it.

And it was the maternal instinct that governed her in that moment of terrorized realization of the dangers which threatened me.

I had suddenly become her charge and care. She saw herself as responsible for the conditions that menaced me, and she was like a wild partridge sheltering its brood, and which will not hesitate to face any peril for their protection.

I was always more or less indifferent, if not insensible, to danger. It may not necessarily be brav-

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ery that refuses to recognize perils; it may be an instinctive quality of dominance, and self-confidence which is convinced of its power to overcome them.

I rose and stood beside her, putting my arm around her as we faced the window from the opposite side of the room.

"Out there lies danger, Zara," I said smiling, "but here, in this room, dwells happiness."

"There can be no happiness with death waiting for you outside," she said, with sharp decision.

"Zara, my love!"

She wheeled upon me and clasped her hands together behind my neck, looking up at me with trouble-shrouded eyes, and with brows that were slightly corrugated by the perplexities of the moment.

"Listen to me, sweetheart," she said, with her face so close to mine that I had all I could do to refrain from interrupting her. "We must not belittle the perils that lie yonder. There are two lives in danger now, for if anything should happen to you, it would kill me also. I am selfish now, Dubravnik, in my concern for you, for after all it is myself whom I would protect, through you. But we must not

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belittle the danger. I know that you are brave and daring; that you have no fear. I realize that you view with contempt the perils that beset you, but oh, my love, suppose that you should not escape."

"Why suppose it, Zara? I am here; the danger is there. We need not anticipate it. Let us leave it to be met at the proper moment, forgetting for this once, that it exists."

"No, no, we must control ourselves. We have been children for an hour or more, forgetful of all things save love; but now let us be what we are, a man and a woman who have perils to face."

"And who, I trust, have the courage to meet them, Zara."

"Ay, courage; but courage alone does not always accomplish the sought for end. Courage alone is not inevitably competent to meet and overcome conditions. And we need more than courage, Dubravnik; we need resource."

"Resource is something with which we are both moderately well provided," I suggested, smiling, and still refusing to accept her words as seriously as she intended them.

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She stamped her foot impatiently upon the rug, and frowned a little, with a touch of petulance in her manner that was the most bewitching thing I had yet seen about her.

"Do be your own self for a moment," she commanded me, withdrawing from my restraining arm and stepping away out of my reach.

"How can I be myself, when I see and realize only you?" I bantered her.

Then came another transition almost as startling as it was complete.

She threw herself bodily forward into my embrace, clasping her clinging arms about me, while she buried her beautiful face between my chin and shoulder and burst into a passion of sobs which convulsed her so utterly that I was alarmed.

I had tried her too far with my bantering attitude, and my apparent indifference to a threatening and terrible fate.

"Zara!" I said. "My love!"

But she only sobbed on and on, and I held her crushed against me until the storm should pass, knowing that a great calm would succeed it, and that her

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present expression of emotion was only the safety valve for all that had passed between us since the incident when our lips met for the first time.

CHAPTER XIII

LOVE WILL FIND A WAY

WE crossed to the window together, and stood looking through it upon the snow clad streets of the city. The storm of the preceding day and night had entirely cleared away, leaving only the inevitable traces of its violence.

As we stood there, Zara pulled the lace curtains between us and the window, so that we were screened from view, while we were enabled, ourselves, to see with perfect distinctness, up and down the thoroughfare against which her home was fronted.

It might have been a Sunday morning, so peaceful and quiet was the scene, and so purely white was everything, in its covering of snow, while the crisp atmosphere of that cold but brilliant Winter day, sparkled and glinted in the sunshine as if thousands of microscopic diamonds were glistening there.

A solitary policeman passed into our view and out

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of it again, a *britzska* rushed past an adjacent corner with the horse at galloping speed; a child played with its father for a moment, within our range of vision, and then disappeared; a fur clad pedestrian ran up the steps of a nearby residence, and passed inside of it; all these trivial incidents of observation, came and went, while we stood there, leaving behind them no impression save one of peace, quiet and security. Yet they impressed themselves upon my memory indelibly, and I can see before me even now, the vision of that afternoon in St. Petersburg, with the clinging right hand of my beloved one resting upon my shoulder, with my left arm about her warm and pulsing body, with love, in all its transcendent qualities, dominating all things real and unreal, and filling my heart, and soul, and my intelligence, with a perfection of blissful content which words cannot describe, and which may never be understood save by him who has experienced it.

What terror had Zara seen through that window, that had startled her so, just before we discovered and confessed our mutual love? Whatever it may have been, no evidence of it remained, to suggest

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disquiet in my own present sense of security. There was nothing there to menace me, and even though Zara's brother Ivan, and others of his kind, fanatics all, in their nihilistic tendencies, wild beasts in their blood lusts, fiends in their methods, as they were — whatever they might threaten, seemed small indeed to me, in that moment of ecstasy. For it was a moment of ecstasy; the word "moment" being measured by the rule of space, limitless and unconfined.

Zara did not know who and what I was, save only that I was a man, and her lover. Beyond that, her imagination had not travelled, and her desires had not sought.

She did not understand that I was at the head of a great fraternity, organized and established by myself, and that I had under my control, if not obedient to my direct command, several hundred individuals within the limit of that city, who would serve me instantly, and who would fight to the death for me if there were need.

It was to be regretted that I had gone to the home of the Princess Zara to keep my appointment

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that day, with so little thought of the dangers I might have to encounter before I should leave it again. It would have been so easy to arrange for adequate protection, and to have had at that very moment, when I was gazing through the lace curtained window, assistance ready at hand in the shape of men prepared to answer to any signal I might have agreed upon. A word dropped to O'Malley at his café, a sign made to big Tom Coyle, a note in cipher to Canfield, an indication to anyone of my trusted lieutenants, would have placed about me at that very moment, an environment of protection adequate to cope with any difficulty that might arise.

But I had not foreseen the present circumstance sufficiently to be prepared for it in that manner.

Zara and I were practically alone in that great house, save for the servants it contained; and they were not to be counted upon in any case, no matter what form individual effort against us might take.

I was conscious, too, while we stood there so silently together, of the new responsibility I had taken upon myself during the love scene that had

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just passed; and I was suddenly aware of the danger which threatened my beloved, through me.

I did not realize it until that instant. I had thought, selfishly enough, only of what she had said about my own peril. I had remembered only that I was the object of a planned assassination, because some one whom I had not discovered at the time, had overheard the interview in the garden to which I had been a witness the preceding night, and had also listened to the one that followed it, between Zara and me.

The thrill of alarm that convulsed me, when the full realization of this aspect of the affair came home to me, was startling and paralyzing. Whatever the friends of nihilism might do to me now, would have its crushing effect upon her, also. Nothing could touch me, that would not injure her. We had become one, indeed, in the sense of being so absorbed in each other, so blended in soul and in thought, that whatever affected one, must act with redoubled power upon the other.

Judged from the standpoint of the nihilists themselves, there was no doubt that they were logical

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enough in their determination to kill me. From their view of the case, I was merely a spy, or at least a prospective one, who had overheard a confidence delivered by the Princess Zara de Echeveria, which placed her so absolutely in my power that I held her life, as the saying goes, in the hollow of my hand; and they could not know, would never guess, that now we had learned to love each other, and that she was dearer and sweeter to me than all else in the world.

They would regard me — they must now regard me, as being like other men of their knowledge, who would see in Zara only a beautiful and attractive woman, young and gorgeous, who was suddenly fallen into my power, almost as absolutely as if she were made my slave. What personal sacrifices could I not demand of her, if I were indeed like those other men I have mentioned? What indignities could I not visit upon her, claiming my right to do so as the possessor of her secret, and threatening, not alone her own undoing, but the death of her cause, if she should dare to deny me?

Somewhere out there in the snow, Zara's brother

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Ivan was waiting and watching, and although I did not now feel that his affection for her included many of the self sacrificing qualities that a brother should have for a sister, he was nevertheless her blood kin, and without doubt he had loaded his pistol with a bullet for the man whom he believed would have it in his power to crush that beautiful sister to the earth even to the point of literal seduction. For judged from the nihilists' standpoint again, they understood Zara to be one who would not hesitate at any sacrifice, in defense of the cause she served.

"It does not look as if danger, and even death, lurked somewhere yonder in the bright sunshine, Dubravnik," she said to me in a low tone, after we had stood for a long time in utter silence, together.

"No," I replied.

"It is a peaceful scene," she went on in a dreamy sort of manner, staring into the street, and with a half smile upon her lips. "It looks as if we might put on our furs and wraps, and go abroad together, without the least thought of danger, does it not?"

"Yes, Zara."

"And yet —" she raised one hand and pointed —

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"probably just around that corner, yonder, or behind one of the others, there are waiting men, who are intent upon your destruction, no matter what the consequences to themselves may be. It is awful to contemplate." She shuddered. "I cannot bring myself to believe that it is really true; and yet I know it to be so."

She turned to me with a swift gesture, and continued.

"Oh, Dubravnik, what shall we do? What shall be done to escape the death that threatens you and me? Tell me! Tell me what can be done? The condition is not the same, now, as it was. Everything is different since you kissed me. This world in which we live, is a new world, but we must nevertheless face the conditions of that old one we have deserted. What shall we do? What shall be done?"

I was silent, not because I hesitated to answer her, not because I really at that moment had no answer to give her, but because I was, myself, intently thinking upon the very problem she had suggested.

"What shall be done?"

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Presently, with a slow and methodical motion, she withdrew from me again, and returned to the divan, which had been the scene of our awakening love, calling upon me to follow her as she went; and I stood before her, looking down into her eyes upturned to mine, waiting for her to speak. I knew that she had hit upon some solution of the difficulty, and was about to present it to me. I don't think that it occurred to me to consider seriously whatever she might suggest, even then, for I had not for a moment lost confidence in my entire ability to free both of us from the dangerous environment; but I delighted to hear the sound of her voice. I loved to drink in her words, as she uttered them. I was enthralled in watching the play of expression upon her features while she talked; if she had rendered me a dissertation upon any theme which absorbed her, my interest would have been the same; I was overwhelmed in love.

"There is only one way; only one," she said, unconsciously repeating words she had used once before.

"Yes?" I replied, mindful only of the fact that

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she had spoken; unmindful of the import of what she said.

"Only one way," Zara repeated. "You must join the nihilists. You must take the oath."

I shook my head with emphasis, brought back suddenly to the intent of her words.

"It is impossible, Zara," I said.

"You must do it, Dubravnik."

"No."

"I say that you must do it. You must take the oath. You must become a nihilist. It is the only way. I will send a servant from the house, with a message which will bring two or three of the leaders here, and you shall take the oath."

She started to her feet again, reaching toward the bellcord, and I had to spring after her, and seize her arm, in order to restrain the act she was about to commit.

"No, Zara," I said, and forced her gently back to the couch, compelling her to be seated, and this time dropping down beside her, and putting my arm around her. "No, Zara, not that. I cannot take

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the oath. It is utterly impossible. It is much more impossible now, than it was before."

"Why?" she asked, in surprise.

"Because I love you, dear."

"Ah," she said smiling, "as if that were not a greater reason for your taking it, instead of denying it."

"No, Zara," I said again. "I cannot take the oath of nihilism. I have already taken an oath which thoroughly obviates such a possibility."

"Another oath, Dubravnik?"

"Yes."

"To whom?"

"To the czar."

"Oh," she exclaimed, and she shuddered. "I had forgotten that you were in the service of his majesty." I thought that she drew away from me at that, but the motion was so slight as to be almost imperceptible. "I had forgotten all that about you, Dubravnik." Again there was a shudder, now more visible than before. "You are under oath to the czar; to the man, who, because he permits so many

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wrongs to happen I have learned to hate." She straightened her body. "And Dubravnik I can hate quite as forcibly as I can love."

"I do not doubt it," I said.

"You must take the oath. You must take it. You shall repudiate that other one to the czar."

"It cannot be, Zara."

"It must be! It shall be!"

"No," I said; and there was such calm finality, such forcible emphasis in the monosyllable I used, that she drew still farther away from me, shuddering again as she did so, and I saw her face grow colder in its expression, although I did not believe that it was caused by any change in her attitude toward me.

"Can nothing move you, Dubravnik? Can nothing change you from this purpose of yours? Must you, because you have given your word to a tyrant, remain loyal to him? Must you, in spite of the great love you have for me, remain true to him who is my enemy?"

"I must; for your sake as well as for mine."

"For my sake!" she laughed, and it was not a pleasant laugh to hear, especially at that moment,

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and following as it did upon all the tenderness that had passed between us. "For my sake! Why Dubravnik, it is for my sake that I ask you to take the oath."

"Zara," I said, choosing my words deliberately, "last night in the glass covered garden, where the colored lights were glowing, I heard you utter words which I can never forget, and which I have thought upon many times since I heard them. You repudiated, with all the intensity of your soul, the methods which these nihilists employ to attain their ends. You called them murderers, assassins, scoundrels, cut-throats, defamers of character, and many other things which I need not name. What you did not accuse them of, in words, you charged them with, by implication; and now you ask me to become one with them; and not only that, to deny my manhood and my honor by repudiating my oath to another."

"I asked you to protect yourself and me," she said, simply, but with a coldness and a suggestion of hardness in her tone, that had been entirely absent from it until that instant.

"I will do that, Zara. I will save you, and I

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will save myself. I will save you from yourself. There will be a way. I have not yet determined upon what it will be, but I will find a means."

Suddenly she slipped to the floor, upon her knees before me, and with clasped hands upraised, in an attitude of supplication, she cried aloud in a very agony of intensity.

"Oh, my love, do as I ask you to do. Take the oath of nihilism."

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCORN OF A WOMAN

IT seemed at that moment as if I could not deny her. Every impulse of my soul cried out to me that it would be a very little thing to do, after all.

It was not the danger which threatened, that influenced me, not at all that; it was her own supplication. The danger, and our own necessities, were very real for her, even if I, in my secret heart, made little of them.

For a moment I think I was undecided, but then the full force of what such an act would mean, the full realization of what I would become in my own eyes by so stultifying myself, brought me back to energy, and I reached forward, grasping her, and drew her to her feet; I rising, also.

"Zara," I said, with deliberation, "once and for all, and for the last time, we must not discuss such

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a thing. If I should take the oath of nihilism, if I should even consider doing so, I could not look into my mirror, save with horror. I am a man in the employ of his majesty, the czar. I have given him my word of honor, as an American gentleman, to do and perform certain things, and I will and must do and perform them all. I should say, too, that he did not seek me, but that I sought him. That is to say, he did not seek me with any knowledge on my part that he did so, and I sought him while I was entirely ignorant that he even guessed at my intent. Seeking him, I was brought into contact with him. I have found him to be a man who is worthy of much admiration; a man for whom I have infinite respect and esteem, notwithstanding the charges you make against him, and the things of which you deem him guilty." She made a gesture of repulsion, but I took no notice of it, and went on. "I find now, Zara, in the light of what has occurred here between us, and in the glory of our great love, that I must tell you who and what I am, and how it happens that I am here with you, at this moment." She bowed her head in acknowledgment of my state-

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ment, but made no reply in words. She had changed wonderfully in the last few minutes, and she was cold now, and distant, shocked, I thought, by this new difficulty that had come between us at the very moment of our greatest happiness. "I am Daniel Derrington, an American. I have been, for many years in the past, in the service of my government as a diplomatic agent and secret service officer; something very much after the character of what you would call over here, a spy. Yet, in my country, Zara, we have no spies, as you understand the term. My employment has been an honorable one, and no man can defame it." She shrugged her shoulders, and I went on rapidly. "In the operation of my duties, I have visited St. Petersburg several times. From a distance, and as an observer only, I have studied nihilism and the nihilist. Some time ago, a friend of mine whose name perhaps you will recognize, came to me and made a suggestion, which, having followed, has ended by my being here."

"Who was that man?" she asked.

"Alexis Saberevski."

She nodded.

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"I know him," she said simply.

"In coming to St. Petersburg and seeking audience with his majesty, acting thereby under the suggestion made by my friend, I proposed to the czar the organization of a certain band of men whose duty it has been, and is, and will continue to be until it is successful, to drive organized nihilism out of Russia."

"You can never do that," said Zara, with fine contempt.

"I can do it. It shall be done."

She tore herself from my grasp and leaped to her feet, darting across the room and placing the table between us, with a motion so quick that she was beyond my reach before I could detain her. I had expected from her violent action, an outburst of words; but it did not come. Instead, she stood calmly beyond the table, leaning gently upon it with one hand, and gazed across the space that separated us, while she said, coolly, and not without contempt:

"Complete your story, Dubravnik. It interests me. I shall be glad indeed to hear it, finding as I now do, that I have permitted myself to fall in love with a professional spy."



— Bent Knight —

"I HAVE PERMITTED MYSELF TO FALL IN LOVE WITH A
PROFESSIONAL SPY"

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God! how her tone hurt me! How the words she uttered pierced me! How the contemptuous scorn in her voice and manner, tore to shreds the fabric of a beatific existence I had created in my imagination! A moment ago, confident of her love, her admiration, and her esteem, I saw now, when it was too late, that the very announcement of my profession had destroyed it, with a stroke as deadly as the knife of an assassin in the heart of his victim.

And I understood, also, why my statement should have had such an effect upon her. Reared as she had been, in the society of St. Petersburg; taught from her cradle to hate and despise, as well as to fear, a spy; educated in utter abhorrence of everything that pertains to that class, at the Russian capital, she could look upon me, now, only with horror and loathing. I was that thing she had most despised. I was that monstrosity of creation, which, calling itself a man, was, according to Zara's lights, without principal, honor, integrity, or manhood.

I stood before her, not with bowed head, as perhaps I might have done had my true feelings been expressed, but with bowed and stricken heart, sud-

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denly aware that I had gained the glory of her love only to lose it, and in a manner which carried with it no redress.

"I have completed an organization of men, Zara," I went on, calmly, and in a tone which I endeavored to render as monotonous as possible, "that has for its purpose the undoing of nihilism, as it is now practiced. That body of men extends, in its ramifications, throughout St. Petersburg, and even to other cities of Russia. Its purpose, primarily, is not to send conspirators to Siberia to suffer exile there, with all the other horrors that go with it, but to —"

"Enough!" she interrupted me. "I have heard quite enough, Dubravnik! What you say to me now, is meaningless twaddle. You are like all the others who pit themselves against the silent body of men and women who are engaged in seeking the freedom of their country. If you knew anything of the horrors of Siberia, to which you so glibly refer, you would shudder when you mention them, and you would fly with horror from any act of your own that might commit a person to Siberia, and exile."

She came half-way around the table, and stood

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facing me, somewhat nearer. "If you had taken a journey through Siberia before you offered your services to the czar, you would have strangled yourself, or have cut out your tongue, rather than have gone to him with any such dastardly proposition as you confess yourself to have fathered. *You* prate of stultifying yourself by taking the oath of nihilism, and repudiating your word to Alexander. **YOU! YOU! A PROFESSIONAL SPY!**" She threw back her head and laughed aloud, not with glee, but with utter derision of spirit, and I shrank from the sound of it as I might have done from a blow in the face.

Again she was a creature of moods and impulses. Again the wild Tartar blood, leaping in her veins, controlled her. With a sudden move she came nearer to me, and bending forward, looked into my face intently, as if searching for something which had hitherto escaped her notice.

"What are you doing, Zara?" I asked her; and she replied.

"I am searching for the man whom, but a moment ago, I thought I loved. I am seeking to find what it could have been that I saw in your eyes, or your

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face, or your manner, that has so '*stultified*' ME. It is an apt word, Dubravnik."

"Seek further, and perhaps you will find."

"No," she said. "He is gone, if he ever was there;" and she shrank slowly away from me, backward, across the room, until the table was again between us, and she stood leaning upon it with both hands this time, peering at me with widened eyes that might have belonged to a child in the act of staring between the bars of a cage at some wild beast confined within it.

It is impossible to describe her attitude and the expression of her face, at that moment. Horror, repulsion, contempt, loathing, even hatred, were depicted there. I recognized the fact with shuddering despair. I was that one thing which she most despised.

It is strange how the light of the world went out, for me. In realizing the great calamity that had fallen upon me, I forgot all else; but strangely enough I did not once think of appealing to her. Slowly I turned away, and with slow strides approached the door which would admit me to the

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corridor, and so permit me to pass from the house to the street.

I reached it; I drew it open. I did not turn my head to look at her again, lest I should become unmanned, and degrade myself by pleading with her for the impossible. I passed into the hallway and pulled the door shut behind me, and then, somehow, I got as far as the balustrade, which, by following it, would lead me to the bottom of the stairs at the house entrance.

My foot was upon the first step of the stairs when I heard rushing footsteps behind me, and instantly was caught by clinging arms around my neck, and I felt her hot and quick breath upon my cheek.

She did not speak; she only clung to me. I did not speak; but I turned about with restored strength, and with my spirit renewed. I seized her in my arms. I crushed her against me, violently. I raised her from her feet, holding her as if she had been a child, and then, bearing her with me, I strode backward through the doorway, and into the room I had just left. I carried her to the divan, and I

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seated her upon the edge of it, still retaining my grasp upon her; and I said:

"Zara, you are mine. Nothing short of death shall take you from me. In the last few moments I have experienced all the horrors of a separation from you. A little while ago you loved me. Only a few moments ago, we were all there was in creation. For a moment which has seemed an eternity, I believed that I had lost you, but when you followed me to the landing of the stairway, I knew that I had not lost you, even for that instant. You love me, Zara, and you shall be mine. Before God, you shall be!"

For a moment I thought she intended to struggle again, to escape me. Indeed, I was certain that she was on the point of doing so, and I tightened my grasp upon her while I dropped upon one knee, and added:

"Zara, let me hear you say once again that you love me."

Her answer was a burst of tears, and for a time she could find no other expression for her emotions; and while these lasted, she clung to me the more



" I DO LOVE YOU "

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tightly, so that when, at last, the storm did come to an end, her lips were closely against my ear, and I heard the whispered words:

"I do love you."

But instantly she started away from me, and she cried out.

"Wait! wait, Dubravnik! I remember, now, that I had begun to tell you a story. I was telling you what made me a nihilist."

"Yes."

"I will finish the story, if you will let me."

"Finish it," I said; "but do so while my arm is around you, and with your head resting against my shoulder. Let me hold you here, where you are, so that I may know I will not lose you again. You are a creature of such changing impulses. That half-wild nature of yours is sometimes so violent in its conclusions. Tell me the story, Zara. I will listen to it."

CHAPTER XV

THE MURDER OF A SOUL

ZARA did as I requested. She seated herself upon the divan, and I sat beside her, with my arm around her. She rested her head against my shoulder, and in a low and dreamy tone she began, as if there had been no hiatus, the continuation of that story which was to thrill me as nothing else of the kind had ever done.

You must understand that she was pleading for my life, as she believed, in the relation of this bit of history which I was soon to learn had touched her so closely. She believed that my life could be saved only by means of my joining with the nihilists, in consenting to take their oath, and to become one with them. I have often, at retrospective moments, gone back again to that hour, and lived it over in thought, wondering how I could still resist her when I listened to the passion of her utterances, and to a

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recital of the terrible wrongs that had been visited upon those whom Zarah loved, in the name of the czar.

As before, she told the story as if I had been the participant in it; as if the young woman whose history it touched most closely, had been my own sister.

In the retelling of it, I purposely render it as concise as possible, but I am utterly incapable of imparting to it the dramatic effect of her recital, heightened and added to by her warm sympathies.

"Remember," she said, "that I am representing you as the brother of this poor girl, Dubravnik. You, and your sister Yvonne, orphaned in your youth, occupied together the great palace of your father's, and were waited upon by an army of servants, many of whom had been in the employ of your family before either of you were born.

"Among your acquaintances there is another officer, one who is as great a favorite at court; and within the palace of the emperor, as you are. He is of good family, handsome, accomplished, and rich. Nevertheless, you dislike him, principally because

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he is in love with your sister and you know that he is, in every way, unworthy of her. She shares the aversion which you feel for this man, declining all his advances, and at last refuses to receive him. Beginning with that time, he persecutes her with his attentions, to the point where you are led to interfere; but this man has already been to the czar, and has secured his royal approval of the marriage. He laughs at you when you remonstrate. You also go to the czar, who listens attentively to all that you have to say, finally consenting that Yvonne shall not be forced into the marriage against her will. This officer, when he hears of it, is furious, and one night, at the club, he publicly insults you, so that you have no other course than to challenge him. He is a practiced duelist, and believes that he can kill you easily; thus he would leave the coast clear for his further machinations. In the affair which follows, you surprise everybody by wounding your adversary quite seriously; and during a few months that succeed the duel, you are relieved of further anxiety concerning the matter. But he recovers; he returns to his former position at the palace; and misjudging

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his power and influence, insults you again, almost in the presence of the emperor. For that, he is banished from the palace, and degraded in the army; and quite naturally he attributes his misfortunes to you, upon whom he vows vengeance. You hear of his threats, but laugh at them — and forget them. He does not.

“This man becomes a nihilist and a dangerous one. He plots and plans for your overthrow, and for the possession of your sister whom he continues to persecute in many ways. She does not tell you these things, fearing the consequences if you were to fight another duel. At last, however, more or less of it comes to your attention, and the consequence is that you publicly horsewhip him, for which act you are suspended from attendance at the palace for thirty days. During that interval a horrible thing occurs. It is at the time when the extremists among nihilists are rampant, and when the secret police does its deadly work unquestioned; a time five years ago. People are arrested and spirited away, from among the highest and the lowest. Victims are found in the palace as well as in the hovel. No person is

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sacred from these mysterious arrests; no tribunal hears a victim's defense; no official dares to interfere. Even you may at any moment become a victim of this awful method. A complaint is lodged against a wholly innocent person, no matter by whom; it may even be anonymous. In the dead of night police from the Third Section visit the house of the person complained against, a search is made, and if incriminating documents are found, that person disappears forever. Where? nobody knows save those who carry out the secret decree. I will not worry you with the useless details; in fact you have had sufficient introduction to the story already.

"Twice each week since your expulsion from the palace you are compelled to remain on duty over night, and at last the morning comes when you return to your home after one of these vigils to find yourself face to face with a horror which you knew existed, but which you had never before comprehended. Ah, it is pitiful; but listen. You find when you arrive, that all is excitement. The servants are running hither and thither; they whisper among themselves, and at first you can get no explanation

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from them. In vain you call for your sister. Frightened glances, sobs, and groans, are the only replies you get, and you rush to her apartment, only to find that it is empty — that she is gone. The room is in the utmost disorder. Clothing is scattered everywhere. Yvonne's most sacred treasures are strewn upon the floor. The contents of her dressing case are tumbled in confusion upon the furniture. Chairs are overturned. The cushions of the chairs and couches are ripped open. The bed is a ruin, dismembered, torn apart, and heaped in a corner. The carpet has been pulled from its fastenings, and is rolled and tumbled into a mass in the middle of the floor. The pictures are torn from the walls; vases have been overturned; even the French clock, on the mantel, has been ruined in the awful search, and the very walls of the room are dented by the hammer which has pounded them in the effort to find a secret hiding place. You know only too well what has happened, and yet you do not realize it. You are dazed. You think that you will awake and find that it is all a dream. You cannot believe that it is the sleeping room of your own

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sister that has been thus invaded and desecrated. At last from one of the older and more trusted servants you hear the truth, and while he speaks, you listen dumbly, wonderingly."

Zara left her place beside me on the divan, and stood facing me, near the center table, and in the intensity of her story, lowered her voice perceptibly. She bent forward a little, unconsciously throwing over me the same sort of spell that now dominated her. In my own eagerness I leaned forward, my right elbow resting upon my knee, and with bated breath, waited for her to continue. When she did resume, it was with a suppressed intensity that is indescribable.

"This is what the old servant told you: An hour after midnight there was a peremptory summons at the door, and when he opened it he discovered beyond the threshold, one of those terrible details of fiends which the Third Section sends out on its foulest errands; but he did not dream that they were after your sister; he only thought that you were in trouble. The officer in charge went straight to the door of your sister's room, as if he were as familiar

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with the internal arrangements of the house, as were its regular inmates. He threw the door ajar without warning, and followed by the scoundrels who accompanied him, entered the room where your sister was in bed. Sleeping innocence was aroused by a brutal command. Your sister, as pure, as sweet, as guiltless of wrong, as beautiful in spirit as the angels in heaven, was dragged from her bed by the rough hands of those human devils. Her shrieks and cries, were answered by jeers. Her piteous appeal that they would leave the room until she clothed herself, was refused with curses. She was compelled to dress in their presence, underneath the blazing glare of every light in the room, and before the eyes of those inhuman wretches whose gloating, bloodshot gaze befouled her sweet purity, as a drop of filth will befoul a limpid spring."

"If you had entered the room at that moment, and the czar had been there, would you have killed him, Dubravnik? Have you a sister? Answer! Would you have killed the czar, if he had been there? THE CZAR WAS THERE!"

Zara raised herself to her full stature as she cried

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aloud this statement. Her right hand was raised high above her head; her attitude was one of righteous denouncement, and the wrath of an outraged goddess glowed like living fire, in every attribute of her being. Then she came a step nearer to me, and continued:

"He was there in the spirit of the outrage. He creates and upholds the law which permitted it. Yes, you would have killed him, and you would not have called it murder. You would have given the deed another name; you would have called it retribution. I see it in your face; it flashes in your eyes. I am not telling you a romance, in order to excite your compassion, or to create sympathy. I am relating an actual occurrence. I am telling you the story that made me a nihilist."

What a woman Zara was at that moment! She seemed the embodiment of vengeance — of righteous retribution; the personification of the cause she so splendidly advocated. I looked upon her almost with awe, at the same time realizing that I was thrilled almost into active acquiescence to her demands. She continued:

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"There are not words to describe the emotions that sweep over you, as you listen to the servant's story. You become benumbed, dazed. You hear it through to the end, and there is not much more.

"You learn from him that papers of incriminating character were found among your sister's effects; that a letter was there, which told that she was engaged in a conspiracy to assassinate the czar, by poison; that she, being a welcome guest at the imperial palace, had agreed to put poison in the wine that he should drink on the following day — a deadly poison — cyanide of potassium; that the poison itself was found with the letter — a harmless looking powder, but a deadly one. You are told that Yvonne was dragged away by those men, and taken — ah, the servant could not tell you where they took her; but he could tell you how she sobbed, and moaned, protesting her innocence, repudiating all knowledge of the things they had found, crying out for you, in her agony; and how one of the men struck her a brutal blow in the face, because she would not be quiet. That is all the servant could tell you. Yvonne was gone. That one truth glared at you

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from every hideous corner of the desecrated room. Hours — many of them — have passed since then. You laugh wildly, insanely, as you brush the servant aside, and dash from the house in pursuit.

“‘The czar is my friend! He is her friend! He will save her!’ That is what you cry aloud as you run along the streets towards the palace, forgetting your *britzka*, in your haste, and agony. You forget that you have been suspended from attendance at the palace, and that the guards have been ordered not to admit you, but you are made to remember it when you arrive. They stop you. You cannot get past them. In vain you tell them of the arrest of your sister, and that you must see the emperor, but you only give them an added reason for keeping you out. They order you away. You refuse to go. They attempt to force you, and you strike one of them, knocking him down.”

“Then all your pent up agony is loosed. You have the strength of a dozen men. You scatter the guards around you like flies, and rush past them, straight for the cabinet of the emperor, where you have always been a welcome guest. You tell your-

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self that he loves you — that he loves your sister; that as soon as he hears the truth, he will correct the awful wrong that has been done; that the men who outraged the sanctity of your sister's sleeping room, will be punished. Ah! You do not know the czar — that man whom you call your friend; who is God's and man's worst enemy!

"But you are soon to know him better. You are soon to discover what manner of man it is to whom you have given your soul and body, your allegiance and your worship, all the years of your life. You are soon to know — and oh, how bitter is the awakening.

"You dash unannounced into his presence. In a wild torrent of words, you pour forth the awful tale. You laugh, you cry; you implore, you demand; he only frowns, or smiles derisively. You rave; he calls the guard. You find that he *does* know; that others have been there before you, and that the letter supposed to have been found in the possession of your sister, has already been read by him. With horror, you realize that he believes — that there is no hope for the sister you love so tenderly, who was placed

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in your arms by your dying mother; whom you swore to guard, and protect.

"That terrible man, who commits thousands of murders by proxy every year, frowns upon you, who have been almost like a son to him. He sneers at your agony. He believes all that has been told to him against your sister — he is even willing to believe that you are a party to her supposed misdeeds.

" 'Forget your sister. She is dead to you, and to me,' his majesty commands you, coldly. 'I can forgive you for your present excitement. Forget her.'

"FORGET HER!! God! Forget your sister? Forget the little girl who was put into your arms when a child? Forget the glowing, gorgeous, beautiful young woman she has become? Then you loose another torrent of words. You curse your emperor. You revile the sacred person of the czar. You go mad; you even try to strike him. Ah! It is awful, your agony. The guard seizes you. The straps are torn from your shoulders. The buttons are cut from your coat. The czar himself uses his great strength to break your sword across his knee, and so far forgets his dignity that he strikes you in the face with his

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open hand; and then you are hustled to the palace gate, and thrust into the street, disgraced, helpless, insane." Zara paused an instant, then continued, monotonously:

"Then begins months of hopeless waiting. Every day you beg admittance to the palace. Every day you are refused. You write letters, begging that you may be told where your sister is detained, that you may go to her; that you may share her exile. They are unheeded. You know that she is in Siberia, but Siberia is a vast place — greater than all Europe. You petition men and officers who used to fawn upon you when you were in favor, for information concerning her. They will not even speak to you. They have been ordered not to do so. At last, when nearly five months have passed in this way, friendless and alone, for your property has been taken from you, you join the nihilists."

Zara crossed to the divan and seated herself beside me, clasping one of my hands in hers, and clinging to it as if she were herself in danger of being torn from my side, or of losing me. For a time she pressed my hand between hers, or stroked it gently,

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and when she resumed speech, it was in a softly-spoken voice.

"Then you find friends," she said, gently. "Through their agents, the nihilists ascertain where your sister has been taken. You learn that she is a prisoner on the unspeakably horrible island of Saghalien. Yes, and they tell you more, these new friends and helpers whom you have found among the nihilists. They know about the plot that sent her there. They know that the very man who pretended that he loved Yvonne, bribed one of your servants to place those awful papers among her things, that they might be found there by the police. You search for him, but he is abroad, so you seek out, and find, the servant who was bribed; and him, you strangle. After that, you disappear. The nihilists report that you are dead. St. Petersburg believes it. But you are not dead. You are on your way to Saghalien. Your new friends assist you with disguises; they aid you on your long journey; they provide you with money; and somehow — you never know how — you reach Saghalien, only to find that Yvonne is not there; that she has been transferred. Then you begin a weary

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search which consumes months; so many of them, that they swell into two long years. You go from prison to prison, from town to town, from hope to despair, from despair to hope, and at last — YOU FIND HER! ”

Zara dropped to her knees before me. I knew that the climax of her story was at hand. Her beautiful eyes, widened, and speaking dumbly of infinite sorrow, sought mine, and held them. I bent forward, and kissed her on the forehead. Then she resumed:

“ You find her in a far away prison in the north. You find her half clothed, lost to all sense of modesty, the sport, the victim, the **THING** of the inhuman brutes who are her guards. You find her body; her beautiful soul has fled. She is not dead, but she gazes at you with a vacant stare of unrecognition. She laughs at you when you tell her that you are her brother. She does not know you. She has forgotten her own name. She taunts you with being another brute, like the men she has known there, in that foul haunt of unspeakable vices. Then you go quite mad. You clasp her in your arms, and draw

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her slender body against you. When you release her, she falls at your feet, dead, for you have buried your knife in her heart. Never again will she be the sport of brutal men. You have dealt out mercy to your suffering sister, and the agony you have endured gave you the necessary strength of will. You are God's agent in the deed."

I could feel that Zara was shuddering with the horror of the scene she had described; not at the deed of that brother who stabbed his sister to death to save her, but because of the awful fate of that poor girl, which the tragic act of her brother brought to an end. I drew Zara tenderly into my arms, and held her so for a long time, while she wept softly, with her head pillowed against my shoulder; and after a time she resumed, haltingly:

"When you turned away from your tragic deed of mercy, you killed the guard who tried to stop you. You made your escape; how, you do not remember; but you found your way back here — here, to St. Petersburg. Nobody recognized you. Your hair was white, your face was the face of a corpse. You had one more purpose; the death of two men, the

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czar and the conspirator. And so you went again to your friends, the nihilists. Hush! I am not through yet. There is more — much more, much more!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE MOMENT OF VENGEANCE

Z'ARA'S intensity of passion during her dramatic recital, had imparted itself to me, so that when she ceased speaking for a moment, I felt myself glowing and throbbing with all the excitement that absorbed her. It seemed almost as if I were, indeed, the person who was concerned in the story she had related, and my nerves were strung to the point where I felt that I could go out and kill the czar for the wrongs that had been committed in his name; if not at his connivance, certainly with his permission, and with the presumption of his approval. She withdrew from me and crossed to the window, where she stood looking out upon the snow clad street; suddenly she started, and turned to me. How beautiful she was and how I loved her at that moment!

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"Come here, Dubravnik," she said. I obeyed, and in an instant was at her side at the window.

"What is it?" I asked.

"There; look yonder. Do you see that *karetta*, just beyond the corner?"

"Yes. I see it."

"It has all the appearance of waiting for a passenger who is supposedly within one of the adjacent houses, has it not?"

"It certainly has," I replied, smiling.

"My love, I recognize that *karetta*, and the man in charge of it. It belongs to — never mind whom. That does not matter. But the man incased in fur, who seems to be the driver, is a nihilist; within the enclosure, there is certainly one, and possibly there are two more men. Each of them has sworn to take your life at the cost of his own, if need be. They will wait there until you leave me. Then they will do their work. Do you still doubt that you have been sentenced to death?"

"I have not doubted it, sweetheart."

"But do you doubt their ability to carry out the decree?"

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"I do."

"Ah, Dubravnik, you little know the men with whom we have to deal."

How sweet it was to hear her include herself with me, against them. "They are like bloodhounds on a trail. They never leave it, nor tire. They are indefatigable. When one falls, another takes his place. They number thousands, and you are one."

"WE are one," I corrected her, smiling. "I do not doubt their intentions, but I have not lived till now, and found you, to be killed by the nihilists."

She gazed at me a moment in silence, and then, slowly, she added:

"Do not think that I sought to frighten you by what I just said. I already know you much too well for that. My intention was to warn you."

"I understood you, dear, perfectly."

She turned away from the window again and faced me, and her eyes were glowing with the light of love. Again for the moment we were face to face with the perils that menaced us from the outside, and before that consideration, all else faded to nothingness with Zara. A little while ago she had repudiated me,

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but all-conquering Love had stepped in again, had overpowered her, enthralled her, and I could see that she was more than ever mine own, now.

For a space we looked into each other's eyes across the short distance that separated us. We were reading each other's souls, and both saw and understood all that the heart of love could desire. It was an undiscovered country to each of us, upon which we trod just then; a new creation that was the sweeter because of its strangeness.

"I love you!" Zara whispered; and she came nearer until her hands rested upon my shoulders, until her face was close to mine so that I could feel her sweet breath against me. Her lips were parted slightly in a half smile, and I knew that she had forgotten the waiting *karetta* with its freight of assassins.

I took her in my arms, slowly, tenderly, firmly. I held her pressed closely against me for a moment and then my lips sought hers, and hers sought mine. It was a oneness of desire, a singleness of purpose that brought us together in the kiss of perfect love; and we remained so while minutes sped. I closed

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my eyes and held her the more tightly against me, so that I could feel the throbbing of her heart and the quivering eagerness of her lithe body, warm against my own. We forgot the dangers and perils that surrounded us; forgot the world and all it contained; forgot life and death, czars and their empires, nihilists and their plots, remembering nothing, in that great spasm of adoration. We did not speak. There was no occasion for words. There came no opportunity to utter them. But we breathed, and breathed together. Our hearts throbbed in unison. Our souls communed, intermingled, blended into one. We sighed together, thought together, until my own senses reeled under the strain of it, and I knew that Zara was more than half unconscious of all things save her present contact with me. Ah, heaven, the greatness of it! The magnificence of that moment! The rapture of her caress, and the great joy of mine to her!

Presently I felt her clinging arms relax and I guided her tenderly toward a huge chair. I lifted her as if she were a child and put her softly down among the cushions; and I dropped to my knees,

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still holding her, still with my arms wound tightly around her.

For a long time after that we were silent, and Zara was the first to rouse from our mutual revery.

"Dubravnik," she said, and you can have no idea how sweetly that name was made to sound by her utterance of it, "I have not yet completed the story I was telling you; but there is only a little more, and you must hear it."

"Yea," I replied. "As you will, Zara. I am content. But need we go more deeply into the sorrows of that poor girl and her suffering brother? Let us rather talk of the great joy that has come to us. There seems to be nothing but joy in the world, when I look into your eyes. Ah, little one, it is sweet indeed to be loved by you."

"And sweeter still to love you," she retorted, smiling and rousing herself. "Sit here in this chair," she added, rising and forcing me to do the same; and when I had complied she drew a large hassock toward me, and seating herself upon it while she rested one shapely arm across my knees, with her face upturned to mine, she continued the story.

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"Shall I continue to represent you as being the embodiment of the character I am describing?" she asked.

"If you prefer it so."

"Listen, then, for I think I do prefer it so. I want you to hear the story to the end, for it will make you understand many things which are now obscured; and if I give you the part of the great actor in this tragedy, that also is for a purpose."

"Yes, dear."

"You returned to St. Petersburg intent upon two things, and only two. After those two duties should be accomplished, you meant to take your own life; and in that purpose you were upheld by those among your friends who knew your story.

"You meant to kill the man who had betrayed your sister into the hands of the police, and after that to destroy the real author of all her misfortunes and yours — the czar. You had changed so that you needed no disguise. Had your sister been alive and well, and had she met you on the street she would not have known you. Your once tall form so erect and soldier-like, was bent, and your former quick

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tread had become unsteady. Your hair, black as the wing of a raven when you went away, was now white, like the snow that is heaped out there in the street. None of your old friends recognized you although you met and passed many of them on the avenues and streets in the full light of the day. Even your fiancé who loved you better than she did her life, saw you and passed you by unheeded. She saw your wistful glance, and looked upon you wonderingly; but she, like others, believed that you were dead, and although she felt that her heart leaped to her throat and that a spasm of sorrowful recollections convulsed her when she glanced into your eyes, yet she did not know you. And you — you thanked God that she did not, for you knew that she would have flown into your arms then and there — would have risked Siberia with all its horrors for one more word of love from you. So you passed each other on the street so nearly that her furs brushed against you, and she never knew — never knew — until long after you were dead, when those friends who had helped you when all others failed, went to her and told her."

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"You were an invalid when you returned to St. Petersburg, and you waited for health and strength before completing your work. You had learned patience during those weary months of searching and waiting in Siberia. Then, too, that same Russian officer whom you had sworn to kill, was absent, and you wished him to return. Your friends told you that he had been restored to favor with the czar, that he had been sent to a post in Siberia; but when you arrived he was expected back within the month. He was to take the very place and assume the same official rank that you had once filled in the palace, next to the sacred person of the czar. Ah! If you could only find them together, and destroy them at the same time! Such a climax would be sweet indeed. It was for that that you waited and hoped. But he did not come; you waited, and he did not come.

"During all this time you were like a child in the hands of your friends. You did precisely what they told you to do, no more, no less. You were absorbed by the one idea. You could not see nor reason beyond that. You even forgot your fiancé and your

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love for her, save on that one day when the sight of her on the street brought her vividly before your mind; but the following morning even that recollection was gone. At last your madness changed to a type more morose and sullen. The delay fretted you, and one day without consulting your friends, you resolved to act. You had reason enough left to know that your mind was growing weaker and you feared that it would be altogether shattered; that you would never avenge the fate of your sister unless you acted at once. You told nobody of your intention, but you armed yourself with a pistol and started for the palace. You had determined to kill the czar before your reason fled utterly."

"Regarding the two hours that passed between the time you were last seen by your friends, and the events that happened in the palace that day, nothing is known. What streets you traversed on your way there; how you gained admittance to the palace, which was guarded as strictly as it is now; how you passed the guards and gained access even to the cabinet of the emperor, are mysteries which have never been solved, and never will be this side of the grave.

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All that is known is that you wore your old uniform, the same one from which the czar once tore the buttons, and it is possible that it had something to do with passing you through. At all events you did pass them all, and you did reach the person of the emperor himself. Ah, it must have been grand! I would that I could have been with you then! I would that I could have seen and heard all that took place there at that time — the only time when the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth has been told to his august majesty. There was one of our agents there who heard it all; that is how I know about it now."

"The emperor was alone when you entered, and you had closed and locked the door of the cabinet before he discovered your presence. He did not know that you were there until a sharp command from you caused him to raise his head; but it was only to see you standing there with the pistol in your hand aimed at his head, and to hear you say that if he uttered one cry for assistance, or attempted to call for help in any way, you would shoot."

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Zara leaped to her feet and strode rapidly across the room twice, wringing her hands. She paused, confronting me.

"Oh, my God!" she cried. "To think, if you had only told your friends of the errand, and of the plans you had made for reaching the presence of the czar, that it would have succeeded and you would have killed him — *killed him.*"

She rushed again to my side, and seized me by the shoulders, so that she turned my face until it exactly confronted hers.

"Dubravnik," she cried. "I can almost believe that I am indeed talking to him — to the man whose history I am relating — when I look at you. In some ways you are like him, so like him! But I will still deceive myself with the idea that I am really talking to him about himself. It is easier so. Oh, my love, be patient with me. I must forget for the moment that you are the man I love. I must compel myself to believe that I am talking to him — to the brother of Yvonne."

"Alexander was always a coward, and he proved

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it then. He thought that his hour had come, and that a just vengeance for all the lives that he had taken, was about to fall upon him.

" 'Do not shoot,' he pleaded. 'You shall have any demand you wish to make. Everything you desire shall be granted.' You only laughed at him.

" 'Do you know who I am?' you cried.

" 'No,' he replied. 'Who are you?'

" You told him your name, and he cowered lower in his chair, begging for mercy as a hungry dog begs for food; and all the time you laughed, repeating at every pause he made, those words so terrible for him to hear: 'I have come to kill you because you killed Yvonne.'

" Once he attempted to leave his chair, but you warned him to remain seated. You rehearsed the evils he had done, and was doing. You told him of the night when your sister was arrested. You related how the police had invaded her room. You went over again, the story of your pleading with him. You repeated how he had torn the buttons from your coat, and disgraced you because you loved your sister. You left no detail unrecited concerning that time

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of weary waiting you had undergone, while seeking tidings of your sister. You described the long journey to Saghalien, and the disappointment that awaited you when you arrived. And all the time he cringed lower and lower in his chair, expecting each moment that you would work yourself into the additional frenzy that was necessary to make you pull the trigger of your weapon. Ah, you made him suffer tortures such as he never endured, before or since, even if you did not succeed in killing him. Then, slowly, and with deadly earnestness, you related the story of the months of wandering over Siberia searching for Yvonne, and finally you came to the climax, where you told of her discovery and her death, at your own hands. You had approached nearer and nearer to him during the recital. Twice there had been a summons at the door of the cabinet, but each time, threatened by your pistol, the czar had ordered that he was not to be disturbed. Now, as you came to the end of all you had to say — as you told how you had returned to St. Petersburg, and why you had waited so long before the killing, hoping also to find the other and to kill him, too, you put the pistol almost

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in Alexander's face, and with a loud laugh of exultation — for you were mad, then, mad — you pulled the trigger."

CHAPTER XVII

LOVE, HONOR AND OBEY

THE princess paused and bent her head until it almost touched me. I waited, wondering how it could be that the czar still lived. When death was so near, within a few inches of his face, what could have saved him?

"Hush!" she continued. "The end is not yet — not quite yet. You pulled the trigger, but the charge in the pistol did not explode. That is what you thought, when you leaped backward and raised the hammer for another trial. But it was even worse than that, for there was no charge to explode; the pistol was not loaded. Your poor mind, so overburdened, had forgotten the most necessary thing of all, and you had not prepared your weapon for the work it had to do. You discovered your error too late; but the czar had discovered it also."

"He was bigger and stronger than you. With a

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bound he was upon you. He seized the pistol and tore it from your grasp, and then, while he held you — for you were still weak and he always was a giant — he struck you with it, bringing it down again and again upon your unprotected head, until your brains were battered out, and were spattered upon the floor, the walls, and even the ceiling of the room. And then, when you were quite dead, killed by the hand of the czar himself, when he for once in his life was spattered with real blood, with blood that he had shed in person and not by deputy, His Imperial Majesty staggered to the door, called for assistance, and fainted."

Again she left me, this time crossing the room and throwing herself upon a couch, where she cried softly, like one who has an incurable sorrow which must at times break out in tears. After all, tears are the safety valves of nervous expansion, and there are times when they save the heart and the brain from bursting. I knew that, and I left her to herself. But I also believed that she had not yet told me quite all; that there must be a sequel to all this, and I

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was soon to hear it. After watching her for a long time, I left my seat and went to her.

She raised her head from the pillow, and looked at me, and I have never seen such a combination of emotions expressed in one glance, as there was in her eyes at that instant. Love for me, sympathy for the fate of the man whose story she had told, sorrow for that poor sister.

"There is more?" I asked.

"Very little more. I have not yet told you why I am a nihilist, and that is what this story is for. Yvonne was my most intimate friend. I loved her as I would have loved — no, — better than I could have loved a sister. Her brother Stanislaus, was my betrothed. We were to have been married within the year when Yvonne was taken away. Now you know all"; and she turned her head away again. I could see that she had dreaded this confession.

"No, not all, yet," I said. "What became of the officer who made all the trouble?"

"He returned," she replied, without again raising her eyes.

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"Where is he now?"

"He is here."

"Here? In St. Petersburg?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him? Do you see him?"

"Yes, frequently. He was here last night."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"No."

"Shall I tell it to you?"

"Shall you tell it to me! Do you mean to say that you know it?"

"I can guess it."

"Well?"

"He is a nihilist. He has just returned to the city. All these years he has been absent, and had Stanislaus waited for his coming your story, and mine also, would have had a different ending. But Stanislaus did not wait. The man you mean is Captain Alexis Durnief."

She started bolt upright.

"You knew it? You knew it?" she cried.

"Tell me how you knew it?"

"I guessed it only just now. I guessed it from

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the expression of your eyes when you greeted him last night, that is, coupling that expression with the recital of to-day, and with one or two hints of his character that I gleaned from him. He is the man?"

"Yes. He — is — the — man!!!"

"And you receive him here?"

"I cannot help it. My hands are tied."

"How are they tied?"

"You have already said."

"Yes? How?"

"He is a nihilist. He does not know that I am aware of all his foulness and villainy. He has been assured that I do not know it! And" — here she leaped to her feet and confronted me like an enraged tigress — "he has the effrontery to pretend that he is in love with me, and to believe that I can love him. Pah!"

"And you?" I asked.

"I?"

She crossed the room, but turned and retraced her steps, reseating herself upon the couch. She was smiling now. Her composure had returned though she was still pale, and there were deep rings under

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her eyes which told of the suffering she had undergone.

"Until you came I had thought that I would marry him," said she, calmly. I was more utterly amazed than I could have supposed possible.

"Indeed?" I remarked, raising my brows, but otherwise not showing the surprise I felt. Here was still another phase of the character of the woman I loved so madly. But I could see that she spoke in the past tense; of something no longer considered.

"Yes; I thought that. Why not? It seemed the only way by which I could secure the revenge I believed I must have. I could have obtained it in that way. Long ago he sheltered himself from anything that I could do, under the cloak of our order. I could have married him, and in six months have tortured him into the grave; or, if that had failed, I could have poisoned him. Ah! did you ever hate — truly hate — anybody? If you never did, you cannot imagine the rage that has been in my heart against those two men. No, they are not men; they are beasts, reptiles." So she spoke of Alexis Durnief and Alexander, the czar. I could scarcely recognize

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this woman who could hate others with such intensity.

"Do you think, princess," I said, slowly, "that if Stanislaus were alive, he would approve of such a method of taking revenge for the wrong done to him, and to his sister?" I asked the question impersonally, and without any resentment in my tone, or manner. Indeed, I felt none. We were referring to a possibility that was now as far in the past as were the incidents of the story she had related. But I desired to probe that other side of her, the vengeful one, as deeply as possible, and when she did not reply, I added: "Do you think he would have rested contentedly in his grave, if you had become the wife of the man who wronged him most, no matter what your purpose might be?"

"No," she said. "I do not. But I had not thought of it in that light. I remembered only Yvonne — and him."

"Zara, did you love Stanislaus?"

She sighed deeply. She raised her eyes to mine, and she stretched forth a tentative hand for me to clasp, and hold. My touch gave her a sense of personal protection.

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"How you probe the innermost secrets of one's heart, Dubravnik," she smiled at me. "I will tell you the truth, and the whole truth. It is because I never loved him, because I never knew and appreciated his worth, until he was dead, that I believed that I could not live and bear the thought that he should continue unavenged, while Alexis Durnief, the perpetrator of such outrages, appeared boldly here at St. Petersburg; and even dared to make love to me. I was a girl then, and I did not appreciate all the love that was lavished upon me. I am a woman now, and you have taught me what love is. I am not the same creature, now, that I was a few short hours ago. You have changed the world for me, for you have made what was once a hell, a heaven of sweet thoughts."

"Zara, had you already abandoned the insane idea of becoming Durnief's wife, before we referred to it, now?"

"Yes, I never really entertained it. It only occurred to me as a means of accomplishing an end. I hate the man so, for all he did to Yvonne; and when he dared to raise his hopes to me, knowing that I

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had been her nearest and dearest friend, knowing also that I was once pledged to Stanislaus, I was filled with a bitter hatred more terrible than words can describe. Oh, if you knew the bitterness of one who is used only for a tool, because she happens to possess beauty. But you cannot know; you cannot guess."

"True, I do not know; but I can guess. Remember, I heard what you said to your brother, on this same subject, in the garden."

"Ah!"

Like a flash of light through the darkness, my own peril returned to her.

"You! What are you going to do?" she exclaimed.

"I am going about my daily duty just as though nothing had happened," I replied.

"Those men out there are waiting to kill you. Come! Let us see if they are there still."

We went to the window together and peered out. The *karetta* was still waiting.

"Tell me your true name again," she demanded, rather irrelevantly I thought, as we drew back.

"You told me, but I have forgotten. To me you

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are Dubravnik; but I suppose I must learn the other one."

"You must learn how to answer to it, also, for it is to be yours as well as mine." Then I mentioned it, and she repeated it after me several times, under her breath.

"Do you know of any way, no matter how, to escape those men who are waiting outside?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied, "I know of one."

"What is it?"

"I can have them arrested where they are — every one of them; that is, if one of your servants can be induced to carry a message a short distance, for me."

"He would be stopped. The message would be taken from him, and read."

"He would be permitted to go on again, for the message would mean nothing to those who stopped him. It would be in cipher, and assistance would not be long in coming, once it were delivered. Men in whom I can implicitly trust would soon clear the streets for us. We would have nothing to fear after that."

"Then you are connected with the police, Du-

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bravnik." But when she made the statement I noticed with joy that there was no suggestion of her former displeasure. There was no indication now that she would love me the less because I was associated with the powers she had been taught all her life to abhor.

"No, Zara, not with the police. I have nothing to do with them, nor with any department of that service. The men I shall send for are not even Russians; and they serve me, not this government. They will serve you, as well."

"I believe you, dear one; forgive me. You shall have the messenger."

"You have forgotten one thing, princess."

"What?"

"Your own danger."

She shrugged her shoulders and laughed at that. It was a return to the Zara I had first known. "I have forgotten much since you came," she said. "In what way am I in danger?"

"If those men are arrested, they will know that you have betrayed them to me. Their friends will know it, also."

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"You mistake. I had not forgotten that. But I have remembered that you are here to protect me, Dubravnik. What have I to fear when you are near me?" It was sweet indeed to hear her say such words, sweeter still to realize the full import of them. But there was a phase of our present dilemma which had not yet claimed her attention, but regarding which it was necessary to remind her. Her brother Ivan was doubtless one of the assassins, waiting outside.

"What of Ivan, your brother?" I asked her.

She raised her eyes and looked at me, startled, and they were suddenly moist with unshed tears. There was that same indescribable pain in them, that I had noticed several times since our interview began; that same expression which I could not fathom. But the explanation was ready.

"I have found that there comes a time in a woman's life," she said slowly, "when all her pet theories fall flat and useless, and when every idol that she has worshipped is demolished. Let us not talk of the danger to me. Let us not even speak of my

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brother, until the message is prepared for my servant to carry."

"No, Zara," I told her, with decision. "I do not understand what you meant, just now, when you referred to the demolition of your pet theories. But it is imperative that we should speak of your brother."

"What of him?"

"Is it not more than possible that he is one of the men out there who are waiting for me?"

"Yes, it is. I had forgotten that. But —"

"He would be caught in the net with the others. He would suffer the same fate that fell to them. Are you willing to run the risk of his being there? He has been to Siberia once, you tell me. Are you willing that he should go there again?"

"No, oh, no!" she cried. "No; that must not be."

"You see, then, how impossible it is for you to give me a messenger, unless you can promise for Ivan as well as for yourself."

"Promise? And for Ivan? What promise need I make for him? If he is there shall he not take his chance with those who are with him? But no, no."

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You are right, Dubravnik. I cannot let him be captured, perhaps killed, in this way," she said brokenly. "I cannot sacrifice Ivan. Cannot you see how I am suffering? Even though I try with all my strength to conceal it, can't you see it? Is there not some other way? Is there not something that can be done? Will you not help me? Great God! Must my brother be sent back to the hell of Siberia — or must you —"

"Zara," I interrupted her, deliberately taking a step backwards and putting my hands behind me, fearing that I might clasp her in my arms in spite of my resolution to remain calm and to continue to be master of the situation, "I think there is another way; I believe that something can be done; I will help you; I do see why you suffer. You are torn by so many conflicting desires, child; you do not know which way to turn. Here am I, your lover; out yonder, waiting to kill me, is your brother. But, dear, if you will trust to me, and will obey me implicitly in all that I direct you to do, there is a way, and neither you nor your brother shall come to harm. Will you trust to me?"

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"Yes, oh, yes," she cried unhesitatingly. "What am I to do?"

"Call the servant who is to take the message."

She turned to the door without another word, and disappeared beyond it. The moment she was gone, I took a fountain pen and a pad of paper from my pocket, and wrote rapidly — or seemed to write, for the pen left no trace upon the paper.

My invisible note was completed and I was writing with another pen upon a second sheet of paper when the princess reentered the room. This time the writing was plainly visible, and while I asked her for an envelope I passed it to her to read.

It was addressed to my friend Canfield who had charge of the messenger service, and merely instructed him to "forward the packages that had been left with him that morning" to their several addresses without delay. It was signed, "Dubravnik."

"Is this the note my servant is to take?" she asked, incredulously.

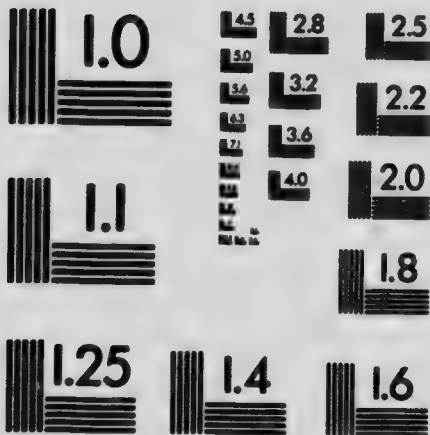
"Yes."

I folded the apparently blank sheet with the other



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and placed them both in the envelope which I had already addressed.

"You see there is no harm in that note, even if the men outside should read it," I added, when the servant had departed. "Your man, who is of course a spy, will read the note, which I purposely left unsealed, as soon as he is out of sight of the house. In an hour every man who is waiting to take my life will be in prison. If your brother is among them, he will not be harmed and you —"

I hesitated, and she raised her eyes to mine and said:

"Well, and I?"

"You will have to do as you have agreed to do, obey me." I hesitated again and then with a desperate courage, added: "Love, honor, and obey me."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POWER OF THE FRATERNITY

THE princess did not start — she did not even look surprised when I uttered the strange sentence, but her great round eyes welled up in tears, and she caught her breath in a half-sob once. Then, without uttering a word, she extended her hand and placed it in mine, and we remained thus, for a moment silent. Presently, in a low whisper, I heard her repeat after me, the words, "Love, honor, and obey;" and she added: "As long as we both shall live."

With a quick gesture that was purely feminine, she withdrew her hand from mine and thrust the clustering hair away from her temples. Then she went to the window and gazed upon the snow clad city, and thus she remained for several minutes.

Presently she returned and came back to where I was standing.

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"It is strange, is it not, Mr. Derrington?" she asked in a low voice. "I do not think that I am myself to-day. It is hard to realize that this is Zara de Echeveria who speaks to you now. I am like another person; it is as though another spirit had entered my body, and I seem to act without a will of my own. It began last night when you first entered my presence. It was evident to me when I saw you apparently asleep in the garden, knowing that you had overheard the conversation between my brother and myself; it asserted itself when we stood together under the green light later in the evening, when you told me that I must keep the engagement made with you to-day, and when you entered this room a few hours ago, it seemed as though you belonged to me — as though you had stolen away my will — as though I had no right to act without your sanction. Can you explain it?"

"No," I replied, "nobody can explain it. It is a secret that is known only to God, and His way are immutable. But we have each recognized it from the first."

We said nothing of love then. The subject seemed

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out of place at that moment. We both knew all that the other would have said, or could with truth say, and there was no need to do what would seem like repeating it.

"When will you hear from the note that you have sent?" she asked presently.

"Very soon, now," I replied. "If your servant has delivered the message, there should be a reply within a few minutes. Let us go to the window and watch."

So we stood there by the window, silently communing with each other without speaking. Her left hand was clasped within my right one, and the minutes came and went until I raised my other hand and pointed silently toward a large, double *britzska* that was approaching. I had recognized the huge proportions of Tom Coyle, holding the reins, and I knew that underneath the covering were trusty followers of mine who would make short work of the waiting assassins.

"There comes the answer to my note," I said. "Watch that *britzska*."

"I see it," she replied.

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It dashed up on a run straight for the point where the other one was still waiting, and came to a stop with a suddenness that threw the horses back upon their haunches. At the same instant there dashed from beneath the covering a half dozen men, and while some seized the horses of the waiting *britzska*, and others pulled the man from the driver's seat, still others jerked open the curtains and sprang inside. From our post of observation we could see that a severe struggle was taking place, and twice we heard the reports of pistols; and then the smaller carriage drove away, while the larger one, that which Tom Coyle had been driving, dashed straight for the door of the princess' house.

"The other contained the prisoners," I said to my companion.

"This one is coming here. Remember now, Zara, that you promised to trust me implicitly. No matter what happens, remember that."

"I will remember," she replied.

Then there came the summons at the door, and the voice of Tom Coyle requesting an audience with the Princess Zara de Echeveria. She looked at me

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inquiringly, and I nodded. In a moment more, Tom, followed by two men, entered the room where we were awaiting them.

"Your name is Dubravnik?" said one of the men, addressing me.

"Yes," I replied.

"And may I ask if this is the Princess d'Echeveria?"

"That is my name," replied Zara.

"I am very sorry to disturb you, but I must request you both to go with me, in the name of the Czar."

Zara started violently, and turned one distrustful glance upon me; but I remained calm and unmoved.

"Do you mean that we are arrested?" she inquired indignantly, returning her gaze to the officer.

"Temporarily, princess. We were forced to make an arrest in the street near this house just now, and from one of the men taken we learned that we had to come here. I can say no more. You will come with us without resistance?"

"Arrested in the name of the czar," murmured Zara blankly. "I did not anticipate this. Yes, I will go with you. Is my house to be searched?"

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"I have no such orders, madame."

Then he turned to me.

"And you, sir?" he inquired.

"I am at your service," I said.

"One moment—" began Zara, who evidently doubted the regularity of it all, but I interposed.

"Princess," I said. "I do not think that these men mean to treat us unkindly. It is evidently some official inquiry brought about by the arrest that he had mentioned. I think it decidedly best to go without question."

Her face flushed and she said nothing more, but having had her wraps brought to her, followed me into the street, and we were soon driving rapidly away. The men were thoughtful enough to give us the interior of the vehicle to ourselves, and as soon as we were seated Zara turned her wistful eyes towards me.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"It means that you are to be protected from the hands of your friends," I replied. "It means that I know that the nihilists would take your life as soon as they know that betrayal of those who were

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waiting for me came from your home. I do not propose that they shall have such an opportunity. It means that I am going to place you for a time where no harm can come to you, and that not one of them will know where you are."

"But how, how have you the authority to do all this?"

"Did I not tell you that I am in the service of the czar?"

"Of my worst enemy, yes."

"Is it not wise to compel your enemies to do your service?"

"Can I accept a service from one whom I hate as I do him?"

"I think so, if your life and mine are both dependent upon that service."

"But where are we going?"

"To the Vladék prison."

"I? Zara de Echeveria, to *prison*?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"To the same place."

"How long are we to be detained there?"

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"Only a sufficient time for us to pass through it and take our departure by another door, to enter another carriage, and to be driven to the house of a friend."

"Ah! I begin to understand. To whose house, then?"

"To the house of Prince Michael."

"I cannot go there! Oh, indeed, I cannot go there!"

"You must disappear for a time, Zara. The prince is my friend and yours; more than that, he loves you, and better than all, he is a prince among men as well as a Prince in rank. Will you not still trust me?"

She sighed and said no more, but as the *britzka* dashed onward she nestled closer to me, as though she found comfort in the thought that the authority was taken out of her hands, and when at last we came to a stop before the prison doors, she whispered:

"I trust you. Do with me as you will. I will obey."

Within the prison, I found Canfield awaiting me,

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and I gave him and Coyle a few hurried instructions; but we were soon on the road again, and in due time arrived at the house of the prince, we passing in by a side entrance. Presently, courtly and grave, but as white as mental suffering can render the face of a man, he came to us.

"You are welcome," he said, extending his hand, first to her and then to me. "The house is at your disposal, princess, and I need not say that there are no servants here to spy on you. I know them all, and your presence will be as secret as the grave."

She thanked him, and was proceeding to explain some of the circumstances which had brought us there when he stopped her with a gesture.

"It is true that I do not understand," he said, "but Dubravnik is my best friend and he will tell me all that is necessary to tell. In the meantime, I am commanded by his majesty, the czar, to remain at the palace for a few days. Let me entreat you to regard everything here as your own."

"Twenty-four hours will suffice, prince," I said. "After that time the princess can return in safety to her own home."

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"Then, if you will excuse me," he murmured, bowing low over Zara's hand, "I will proceed at once to the palace, where I am even now expected. I will await you there, Dubravnik," he added, and the glance that he cast upon me made me wonder if I had not, perhaps, trusted — or, rather, tried — this chivalrous man too far, in taking the princess to his house.

Zara saw and correctly interpreted the glance, for as he left the room upon my assurance that I would follow him at once she put her hands in mine and said:

"Are you indeed assured of your own safety, Dubravnik? Ah, yes, I shall always call you by that name. Are you assured of your own safety? Tell me truly."

"Perfectly; and of yours, also. Have no fears."

Then I raised her hands to my lips, and kissed them both, first one and then the other, again and again; and she, standing on tiptoe, pressed her lips to my forehead.

"Love, honor, and obey," I murmured; and she repeated after me:

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"Love, honor, and obey."

Then I left her.

It was still early in the day, but at that time of the year darkness settles over the earth while yet the day is young, and night was already abroad in the streets. I had much to do ere the dawn of another day, for the time had come when the power of the Fraternity of Silence must be asserted; when I felt that the work that I had agreed to do for the czar was nearly completed. My drag net was ready, and the time had come to cast it.

CHAPTER XIX

PRINCE MICHAEL'S ANGER

NOBODY but myself in all Russia was familiar with the secrets and the mysteries of the Fraternity of Silence. In organizing it, I had anticipated just such a moment as the one that faced me now; that is, an emergency where I would have to depend entirely upon the loyalty of my men, and my own superior knowledge of who and what they were, for my safety.

The partial description already given of that organization conveys only a faint idea of its perfection and completeness. The different departments were thoroughly under the control of their several heads, and those heads were all men whom I could implicitly trust, and I knew that I might even dare to snap my fingers at the power of the police system itself, so great was my own. I had men everywhere; and my gift of remembering names and faces,

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a gift the Almighty had bestowed upon me, gave me the advantage of knowing nearly all of them by sight, although there was not a score, all told, who knew me; and those were every one importations of my own, upon whose devotion I could thoroughly depend, even in the face of regular police opposition. More than that, I had men within the ranks of the police, even within the fold of the mysterious and dreaded Third Section.

I realized fully the danger to my own person in going upon the street at that hour, when I had within so short a time been condemned to death by the extremists — the most implacable element among the nihilists. They do not dread death themselves so long as they accomplish the death of him who has been condemned, and one who has fallen under the ban of their disapproval is in as great danger in broad daylight, among a hundred companions, as he is on dark streets and among unfrequented byways. I thought it best, therefore, to provide as well as possible against another attempt to assassinate me, and therefore sought my own apartments before going to the palace. I intended to adopt a

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disguise of some kind, and, moreover, I had given orders for several of my leaders to meet me there, and I knew that I would find them waiting.

They were there when I arrived — Coyle, Canfield, Malet, St. Cyr, and with them several of their lieutenants. There was another one there also, whose hands were tied behind him, and whose feet were fastened together, while, by way of additional security, he was tied to the chair in which my friends had seated him. That man was Ivan, the brother of Princess Zara. I did not glance at him as I entered, but notwithstanding his presence, proceeded at once to business, instructing my men in exactly what they were to do that night. And he listened intently, first with anger and even rage, then with scorn and contempt, but finally with wonder and genuine fear. I had arranged the affair for the purpose of teaching Ivan de Echeveria a moral lesson. I had determined to save him, even against himself — for Zara's sake.

In order to convey some idea of the moral effect that the meeting had upon him, I must outline a part of it. One by one my men read off lists of the

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nihilists under their jurisdiction, accurately describing them, as well as the several disguises that they were in the habit of wearing, the meeting places of the different branches of the society, and where the members of those branches were to be found at certain hours. Included in the lists were names of many prominent people in the city, officers in the army, policemen on duty, spies in private families, in hotels and cafés, in the palace, at the barracks, in the prisons, and, in fact, everywhere. As name after name was read off, until the number amounted to many hundreds the face of Ivan de Echeveria became as pale as death, and when, at last, his own sister's name was read, and I remarked grimly that she was already a prisoner, and would be on her way to Siberia within the week, he broke out in curses and threats, to which, of course, not one of us paid the slightest attention. When he found that we did not notice him in any way, but proceeded quietly with our business, he relapsed into a moody silence, and I knew that my moral lesson was working. I knew that I could save Zara's brother, for that is what I meant to do. When the lists were

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completed, and I had given my orders regarding who was to be arrested that night, and who was to be spared, having directed that certain of them be told that they could obtain passports out of the country under certain conditions, I dismissed my leaders, and at last stood alone in the presence of Ivan.

"Now, sir," I said coldly, "what do you think of it?"

"I think that this night will see the end of our cause, until other children are born who will grow up to know the wrongs to which the people of Russia have to submit. You may crush out nihilism to-day, but you cannot crush it out forever. It will spring up again like —"

"Like the poisonous weed that it is. I expect that, but this present growth will be cut down to-night. You do not ask what is to be done with you, Ivan."

"Why should I? I know."

"I am afraid that you do not."

"One who would send my beautiful sister to Siberia — Bah! I will not talk with you."

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"Have I been unmerciful except to those who are confessed murderers, and those who are only awaiting a chance to kill?"

"No," he replied, reluctantly.

"Do you not see how impossible it is to accomplish what your people want to do, by the commission of crimes? You, who were one of the men waiting to kill me as soon as I came out of the house of your sister — what was your first thought when my men fell upon and arrested you? Did you not think that your sister had betrayed you all to me?"

"Yes."

"Did you not say so?"

He hung his face in shame and answered:

"Yes."

"Is that not the thought among your friends at this moment, and would the life of your sister be safe from them if she were in her own house to-night?"

"It would not."

"And yet, you call such people your friends — those who would without question put her to death

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on mere suspicion — to a death to which you have helped to condemn her by your own foul suspicions and the more foul utterance of them. Shame on you, Ivan de Echeveria! Shame on you!" Pain contorted his face, and he was silent. "Did you fire the bullet that so nearly killed me?" I asked.

"No, I did not do that, but I directed that it be done. You would not have escaped if I had held the pistol."

"Perhaps not. It is unimportant, any way. Have you not wondered why I brought you to this house?"

"To torture me; that, at least, is what you are doing."

"I brought you here to save you."

"To save me!"

"Yes; from the folly of your youth. You are a man in years, but a boy in every act you commit. Have you manhood enough left in you to want to save your sister, who now, thanks to you, has two enemies to face? Russia would send her to Siberia, and the nihilists would murder her. She would have

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sacrificed herself for you — she offered to do so.
Are you willing to sacrifice yourself for her?"

"God knows that I am."

"Will you prove it?"

"Oh, that I might!"

"You shall have the chance. I cannot quite trust you, Ivan, or, for her sake, I would loosen your bonds and set you free now. But you would hasten to your friends and warn them of their danger, and by that act, you would destroy your sister forever — by that act you would kill her. She is safe and will be safe, if they are not warned of what is to happen to-night. Shall I set you free, and trust to your honor not to go to them?"

"No — no — no! For God's sake, no! Leave me bound! Tie me more tightly! Do not let me go! Kill me if you will, but do nothing to injure her. Oh, are you telling me the truth?"

"The whole truth, Ivan. I will leave you as you are until I return. I do not think you will escape; I do not think that you will try to do so. But you must understand one thing: This night forever ends

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your connection with nihilism. That is the sacrifice you must make to save your sister. Will you make it?"

"If it will save her, I will make it. But will it?"

"If I find you here when I return, and if you are still in the same mood, I will take you to her, and she shall reply to that question for herself."

I left him then, and having altered my appearance sufficiently so that I would not be recognized in the darkness, and being assured that the orders that I had given respecting the work of my men for that night would be carried out, I hastened to the palace. I knew that I had a difficulty to face, for although I had unlimited confidence in the chivalry and generosity of Prince Michael, I also knew that he had an ungovernable temper, and I began to fear that my delay in following him might have led him to say something to the emperor, which would encompass me with puzzling conditions. As soon as I arrived at the palace I was told that the prince was awaiting me in his apartments, and I hurried to him. He rose as I entered the room, and, bowing stiffly, with-

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out extending his hand as was his invariable habit, said coldly:

"You are late, Mr. Derrington. I expected you an hour earlier, at least."

"I am very sorry, prince," I replied; "more sorry than I can say, to have kept you waiting, but I have been unavoidably detained."

"May I ask if it was at my house?"

"I was at my own apartments."

"Ah!"

It was evident that he did not believe me, and that he meant me to understand that he did not, but I was determined not to quarrel with him. Therefore I remained silent.

"May I venture to ask an explanation of the extraordinary proceedings of the evening?" he asked, icily.

"Yes; I think I owe you that much. But would it not be better if I first offered my respects to the czar? Then I can return here, and we can enjoy a long chat together."

"His majesty knows that you were to come to

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me first. After I have heard you, we will go to him together."

"Am I to understand, prince, that you have told his majesty of the occurrences of to-night?"

"You are to understand exactly that. I have told him all; at least all that I could tell."

"Indeed! In that case, we will go to him together. Such explanation as I have to make will be made in his presence. Whatever explanations there are to make are entirely in the princess' behalf, and I regret that I took you at your word and supposed that you would wait for me. She can offer you her own thanks at a more opportune time."

I saw that he was endeavoring with all his strength to control himself, but the veins on his forehead swelled until I thought that they would burst. For a full minute we stood facing each other thus, both silent, and then he turned and led the way in the direction of the official cabinet.

"Prince," I said, just before we entered, "you have no cause to quarrel with me. Remember that in the interview that is to come."

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He stopped short, and turned and faced me before the door of the czar's cabinet.

"Are you quite sure of that?" he demanded.

"I am quite sure. I remember another interview of this kind, when you advised me what not to do. You have no warmer friend in Russia than Daniel Derrington, prince."

For a moment he pondered. I saw that he was hesitating, for I knew that he really liked me. I also knew that he loved the princess, and that he was jealous, for I had done an unprecedented thing in taking her to his house under the circumstances. For a woman to commit herself to the care of a man in the way the princess had trusted herself to me, meant much more in Russia than it does in New York. The prince could find no excuse for the act; still less for my delay in following him when he left his own house in our possession. Presently he spoke. His words came slowly and with careful deliberation.

"What I say now, Mr. Derrington, you may accept in whatsoever spirit you please, but upon my soul *I do not believe you!*"

I bowed, and we entered the cabinet together.

CHAPTER XX

IN DEFIANCE OF THE CZAR

IN all the interviews I had had with the czar during the many months of my association with him he had maintained the condition that he had himself made at the beginning, which was that we should meet on the basis of friends and equals. Whenever we were alone together he commanded me to forget that we were other than two friends who were enjoying an opportunity for a chat with each other, and as at such times we invariably conversed in French, he always insisted that I should address him by the simple term "monsieur." When the prince was with us, as was nearly always the case, the degree of familiarity was slightly, though hardly perceptibly modified, and I must say that I had learned to enjoy such occasions exceedingly.

For Alexander I had begun to feel a sincere affection. I doubt if there was any other man in Russia

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who understood him so thoroughly as I did. During these familiar hours we had passed together he had told me many things concerning himself, his ideas, and his hopes; and these confidences had revealed the real man — that is, the man behind the czar — to me, and I knew that of the thousands of crimes attributed to him only a few had ever come to his knowledge until it was too late for him to interfere, or too impolitic for him to do so. Intellectually, he was not preponderant; indeed he was rather deficient in this respect; but he was naturally a kindly disposed man, and at the beginning of his reign, and indeed through more than half of it, he proved that fact to the people. It was just before the time of my arrival in St. Petersburg that he allowed himself to fall more and more into the power of the nobles who in reality ruled the empire, and who do so still. Easily influenced by those in whom he trusted, thousands of crimes were committed in his name of which he had no knowledge and of which he had never known. At all events, I liked him, and moreover, I had thorough faith in my own influence over him.

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In like proportion to my familiarity at court and to the emperor's fondness for my society, I was cordially hated by the nobility; but as they feared me quite as much as they hated me, and as my real standing among them remained a mystery, I was constantly fawned upon to a degree that was nauseating. Even the story I had so lately heard from the lips of the princess had not materially lessened the liking I felt for Alexander, for I could understand much better than she could, all the influence that had been brought to bear upon the emperor not to pardon the woman in whose possession had been found cyanide of potassium intended for his wine. I did not believe he had intended that she should go to the island of Saghalien; I did not believe that he could be held accountable for the evils that befell poor Yvonne in the isolated garrisons of Siberia. He had been convinced that she intended to poison him, and he banished her; there his part of the evil ceased. The awful things that happened in the garrison he did not know about, could not hear about, for I believe that among all his friends, I was the only one who dared to tell him the truth.

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Even the prince lied to him, for I had often heard him do so.

As to the killing of Stanislaus, who could blame the czar for that? The man had endeavored to kill him; had twice snapped a pistol in his face and still held it in his hand when the emperor tore it from his grasp and struck him on the head with it. Who would not do the same? I repeat all this as my excuse for still feeling that affection for him which our intercourse had taught me. The real criminal in the case of the story of Yvonne was Durnief. Him I hated, and his name was on one of the lists that had been read off to me before going to the palace that night. There were special orders concerning him, too — but that will be dealt with later.

Now, as I entered the cabinet with the prince, I confess that I had some doubts concerning my reception for I had no idea what the prince had said to his majesty, and I knew only too well the inclination of the czar to listen to anything that had a suspicious side to it, particularly if that suspicion concerned one of his closest and most intimate asso-

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ciates. I could at any time, within five minutes, have poisoned the mind of the czar against the prince; and I did not doubt that he could accomplish the same delicate attention for me. The prince preceded me; the czar rose as we entered.

His majesty was alone, and I advanced at once with extended hand, as he had often requested me to do when I discovered him thus; but he bowed coldly, feigning not to see it. I halted, drew myself up, and returned his bow in the same manner that he had given it. Then I waited for him to speak.

"You are late, sir," he said. "You have kept me waiting."

"I was not aware that your majesty expected me," I replied. "Otherwise I should have been here sooner."

"The prince expected you and led me to do the same."

"Had the prince done me the honor to tell me he intended to receive me in your cabinet, I should have understood. The prince — perhaps unintentionally — deceived me."

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Prince Michael flushed hotly, but said nothing. The czar smiled grimly.

"What detained you?" he demanded.

"The same business which detains me in Russia, your majesty."

"Ah; you were concerned in the work of our fraternity?"

"I was."

"I understood that you were much more pleasantly employed."

"Whoever gave you so to understand that either did not know, or lied." I turned so that I half faced the prince, and I saw that he made a motion as if to spring upon and strike me; but he did not dare to commit such an act in the czar's presence, and long training got the better of his temper.

"Why, sir, did you take Princess Zara d'Echeveria to the house of Prince Michael?" continued the czar.

"Because I believed him to be an honorable man who would stand ready to protect her good name, and who would conceal from all the world, even from

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your majesty, the fact that she was there. Because he had told me that he loved her, and I was innocent enough to believe that his love was unselfish; and further, because I regarded him as my friend. There are three reasons, your majesty, any one of which seems to me to be sufficient."

"But why was it necessary to take her anywhere?"

"That, your majesty, is a question which I must answer to you alone."

"Do you mean that you will not tell the prince?"

"I mean that it was my intention to tell the prince as soon as I arrived at the palace, but that now I deem it unnecessary. He has taught me a lesson in hospitality that is as new as it is unique."

"Perhaps she will explain the strange affair herself."

"I have no doubt that she will, your majesty."

"I have sent for her. She will remain here in the palace as long as danger threatens her. She should be here by now."

"May I inquire of your majesty whom you sent?"

"The captain of the palace guard."

"Captain Durnief?"

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"Yes."

I looked at my watch, replaced it in my pocket, and then said calmly:

"Captain Durnief will not return with the princess, your majesty."

Then I saw the heavy frown of rising anger. I knew my man, for kings and emperors are less than men of the world when it comes to studying them. Their own opportunities for observing others are so much more limited. The czar angry, was a much easier man to influence than the czar satirical.

"What do you mean?" he demanded. "Why will Durnief fail to carry out my personal orders? Dare the princess refuse to accompany him?"

"She most certainly would not have the bad taste to refuse, and if she did so, the captain would doubtless bring her by force; but Captain Durnief has the misfortune to be, by now, a prisoner."

"Durnief a prisoner! The captain of my personal staff arrested! By your order, sir?"

"By my order, your majesty."

"You have dared to do this?"

"I would dare to arrest the prince, or your own

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son, if I found either of them inimical to your majesty's interests, and I beg you, sir, to understand that I gave the order before I knew that your majesty had sent him on the errand so treacherously suggested by Prince Michael." I was angry at the prince for involving my affairs so meanly. I could not withhold the thrust.

"It is a lie!"

It was the prince who spoke; but before I could reply to the accusation, the czar waved his hand and commanded silence.

"Was it the princess who informed you that Durnief was a nihilist?" he asked calmly, the smile returning to his face.

"No," I replied, understanding the motive behind the question. For I could read the czar like a book, and I already knew much concerning the villainy of Durnief; "but it was he who informed your majesty that SHE was one."

"By heaven, Derrington, you know too much! I begin to think that the days of your usefulness are past, in St. Petersburg. There seems to be no limit to the authority you assume, and now you have be-

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gun to dictate to me. I will not have it. I command that you tell me why you thought it necessary to take the princess from her own house to-night."

I knew that the crucial moment had come. I knew that if I weakened now, I was lost. The only possible escape for me, was to see the czar alone, and that I determined to do. The manner of the prince, upon my arrival at the palace, his conduct in the cabinet, the greeting accorded to me by the czar and his bearing towards me since then, led me to a shrewd guess which I determined to hazard. I decided to play my last card by making one bold statement.

"Your majesty," I said, deliberately, "has never until now, had less than perfect confidence in me. The prince, being jealous, and too impatient to await an explanation at my hands, has prevailed upon you to order me under arrest, for a time, in order that I may not return to his house where I have left the princess. If I do not mistake, he now has such an order, signed by you in person, in one of his pockets. Permit me to inform your majesty, and him, that there is another reason why he procured that order; he has guessed that my men, at this moment, have in-

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structions to place him under arrest. He only sought to anticipate me, that is all. Order Prince Michael to his apartments, and direct him to remain in them, your majesty; for unless I am free to act as I see fit, this night. I would not give that"—and I snapped my fingers—"for the life of a single member of the royal family."

Then I folded my arms, and waited.

CHAPTER XXI

ONE EVENTFUL NIGHT

ANIHILISTIC bomb exploded in the cabinet of the czar would scarcely have created more consternation than did my statement. The emperor himself started back in amazement, and then turned his face which was white with rage and terror, upon Prince Michael.

The prince, instead of shrugging his shoulders and laughing at the charge I had made, committed the mistake of turning deathly pale, and at once protesting his innocence. It was that protest which decided the battle of wits in my favor. Always ready to doubt those who were nearest to him, the czar remembered instantly that I could gain nothing by playing the traitor. He recalled also many instances, small in themselves but sufficiently prominent now, when the prince had deceived him. That, he knew I had never done. I had always possessed the

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courage to tell him the truth even when it was unpleasant. The habit of truthfulness told, then. He believed me, and he doubted the prince. More than that, I seemed to him to know everything, for it proved to be true that the prince had persuaded him to sign an order for my temporary arrest — or rather, my detention in the palace. It had been done when they were alone in the cabinet together, and how I could have learned of it was a puzzle which he could not fathom. The more the prince protested, the more certain the czar became that I had spoken the truth, and while he glowered upon the unhappy man who became paler and more uncertain in his speech with every effort, I stood calmly by with my arms folded, not enjoying the situation, but determined to win the fight.

“Michael,” said his majesty at last, “give me the order to which Mr. Derrington refers.” I knew then that I had won, and while the prince tremblingly produced it, I waited. The czar passed it to me with the words, “You may destroy it, Mr. Derrington,” and then added: “Prince Michael, you will retire to your apartments and remain there until I

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send for you. I will spare you the indignity of an arrest until I know more. Go!"

I did not look at the prince as he left the room, and I have always regretted it, for if I had done so and had I seen the agony that must have been written on his face I might have saved him. I did not believe the charge against him when I made it, and there was no such thing as a direction to any of my men to arrest him. I charged him with complicity with the nihilists solely to get rid of him, and by that means to save myself and Zara, knowing that later I could save him, also; that he would ultimately forgive me, and that I could bring the emperor to regard it as a most excellent joke, for the czar dearly loved a joke if it were at the expense of some other person. Indeed I intended before I left the emperor's presence, partially to allay his fears concerning the prince by assuring him that my information amounted to nothing more than a mere suspicion which had been strengthened by his effort to detain me in the palace. But events demonstrated the fact that in making the charge I had builded better than I knew. I loved the prince, and that

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episode is one of the greatest regrets of my life. If ever a man was guilty without crime, he was. But I anticipate.

"Derrington," said the czar as soon as we were alone; he addressed me in French by which I knew that I was restored to favor; "you have startled me to-night in a way that I shall not soon forget. Is it true that Michael — ah, no, I cannot believe it, for if he is unfaithful, whom can I trust?"

"You must not cease to trust him entirely, yet, monsieur," I replied. "The charge against him is based upon evidence that may be disproved; but my drag net is out to-night, and the dawn will see nearly every nihilist in St. Petersburg in prison, or on the way out of Russia. If you had been prevailed upon to detain me I tremble for what might have happened."

"Tell me —"

"Do not, I beg of you, detain me now, monsieur. Every moment is precious. My men are swarming over the city, and even now the prisons are filling up. I must get to work, for this is a matter to which I must personally attend."

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"And Michael?"

"Leave him where he is, in his apartments, until I return."

"When will that be?"

"Soon after daylight."

"Then come to me at once. Have me awakened if I am sleeping; but I shall not be."

"I will do so."

"One word more. What of the princess?"

"She would have been murdered to-night by the nihilists had I not arrested her as one, conducted her through the prison, and thence on to the house of the prince."

"Why did you not bring her here and place her in my care?"

"She would not wish to come here, monsieur. Princess Zara once had a lover who became crazed, and was killed here in the palace by one of the guards, I believe, so —"

"Yes — yes, I understand. You did right. Stop! One word more before you go. This conspiracy to which you referred, against the whole

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royal family; are you sure that you have got at the root of it?"

"As sure as I am that I am here in the presence of the Czar of Russia."

"You have never failed me yet, Derrington;" and he grasped me by the hand.

"And I never will, monsieur."

"Well, go. I shall expect you soon after daylight."

In reality there was little for me to do that night, more than I had already done, and yet it was impossible that I should be shut up in the palace with so much taking place throughout the city, immediately under my direction, and over which it was imperative that I must retain supervision. I knew that there would be frequent demands upon me for authority to do and perform certain things, and it was important that I should be on hand. I was always provided with the necessary papers for anything in the official line that I might be called upon to perform. This had been arranged in the beginning, the better to preserve the secret of my business in St. Petersburg. I had innumerable imperial pass-

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ports signed and sealed in blank, and there was no outside authority exercised by any official of the realm which I was not prepared to meet. In short, my power was in many respects greater than that of the czar himself for I was always prepared for whatever I might have to do in any or all of the departments of the empire.

The wholesale arrests which I had ordered for that night, I had long had under consideration, and that I had decided to make them a little sooner than was my first intention, was due in part to the danger surrounding the princess; in part to my own suddenly formed determination to complete my business there and return to the United States; and lastly, to the fact that the last few reports that I had received so nearly completed the knowledge I had striven to attain, that I came to the conclusion that my work was about done, and that it was time to draw the net. My salary was enormous, and already amounted to a competence, and I knew that if I remained in Russia, sooner or later somebody would find me out; and then there would be short shrift for me, between the nihilists on one hand, and the jealous nobility

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on the other, for the latter saw in me nothing but an interloper who had stolen their prerogatives.

My first business on leaving the emperor, was to call upon Jean Morét, for now his usefulness was past, and the time had come for me to keep my word with him, and set him free. Somewhere in the world he would be able to find a safe haven of shelter from the enemies who would claim vengeance; and now, after my net was drawn this night, there would be few active nihilists remaining to seek his life.

"Well, Jean," I said, as I entered the room where he was confined, "would you like to leave prison and Russia?"

"Indeed I would, sir," he replied. "There is nothing that would make me quite so happy as that. Has the time come to let me go?"

"I think so. Are you quite sure that there is nothing that would make you as happy as permission and passports to leave the country?"

"Quite."

"Not even —"

"No, not even that to which you refer, or are about to refer. I have had plenty of time for

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thought, since you brought me here, and I have unraveled the fact that I made a consummate fool of myself. I will not deny that I still love her, or that I probably always will love her, but I know that she never did, and never will, love me. That ends it, you see, and so I am glad to get away."

"Was it the princess, Jean?" I asked.

"You have been very good to me, Mr. Derrington, and I ought to deny you nothing. Still I hope you will not ask me to tell you anything concerning the woman I was foolish enough to love so madly."

"I honor you for that expression, Jean, and I will ask you only one question. You can reply to it readily enough. Do you love her still, and well enough, so that you wish her every happiness? So well that you cherish no ill will against her for what she did to you?"

"I would give up my liberty, now, to be assured that she might always be happy; yes, even to know that she has broken with the nihilists; for sooner or later they would lead her to Siberia. Will you answer one question for me, Mr. Derrington?"

"Willingly."

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"Has she been arrested?" He did not appreciate the confession involved in his question.

"No; and she will not be. She has also broken with the nihilists. And, Morét, I wish you to know that I honor you for not telling me her name. I know to whom you refer."

He was silent a moment, until with some confusion in his manner, he said:

"I would like to shake hands with you, Mr. Derington. You are a good man, and in whatever country Jean Morét finds a home, there you will always find a friend of yours."

We had some other conversation, and then I gave him his passports, together with sufficient money for his needs. I personally conducted him from the place of imprisonment, and we finally parted in the street. That was the last I ever saw of Jean Morét, but whatever his ultimate fate, I knew him to be a man of sterling qualities.

From there I made my way to the office of my friend Canfield, where it was arranged that I should receive the reports of my men, and there, closeted with Canfield, I remained until daylight. Messen-

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gers were coming and going constantly, and I knew long before dawn that every plan that I had laid had worked out just as I intended it should. I knew that when the sun rose, there would not be a half dozen real nihilists at liberty in St. Petersburg, and that the order would be paralyzed and broken throughout the empire. To just one portion of the night's work, I paid particular personal attention, and that was to the arrest and disposition of those who knew Zara and Ivan, personally, and who were aware of her condemnation to death by the order. Many of those who were arrested that night, were sent to Siberia for life, and others, for long terms of imprisonment; but I could not be criticised for that, for they one and all deserved to go. I was yet to meet with an adventure before I returned to the emperor, however.

After leaving Canfield I sought an interview with O'Malley. I found that without going out of my way, I could pass the residence of the prince, where I believed Zara to be peacefully sleeping, for I knew that Durnief must have suffered arrest before there was opportunity for him to carry out the czar's

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order. I had taken the precaution to instruct Coyle, early in the evening, to place a good watch on the house, fearing there might be a chance that one of the spies of the nihilists had succeeded in following us, and that they might attempt an attack upon her, there. Of Durnief, I had not thought again, for when the czar told me that he had been sent after the princess, I had every confidence that the man would be arrested before he could gain admittance to Zara's presence. Later, at Canfield's office, I had received the report that he had been taken.

It was just breaking day as I approached the house, and I could see that a light was burning in the room where I had left her. I decided at once that she had determined to remain in that room, and had probably not thought of retiring. I could not criticise such a reluctance, under the circumstances; and while I was congratulating myself upon the fact that she would not have to pass such another night as this one, I saw the front door swing suddenly open, and the form of a woman in whom I instantly recognized Zara, ran down the steps and leaped into a waiting *droshka*, which had hitherto escaped my

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notice. Instantly the horses started away at a gallop. I was two hundred feet distant. There was not a person in sight, for Coyle, believing, doubtless, that all danger was past, had withdrawn his guard.

There are times in our lives when peril, in threatening a loved one, brings out the best there is in a man, and renders him suddenly capable of coping with any emergency. I knew of but one way to stop those horses, and I used it. Always a good shot, I drew my revolver, aimed it at the nearest horse, and pulled the trigger. Then, before the sound of the first report had lost itself along the street, I fired again. One of the horses pitched forward, shot through the brain, I knew; the other fell upon the first, and I ran forward at all speed, towards the wrecked and overturned *droshka*.

CHAPTER XXII

THE COMBAT IN THE SNOW

AS I ran, I saw an officer in uniform leap from the interior of the *droshka*, and draw his sword in preparation for my attack, while his *yemshik*, whip in hand, scrambled from the snow, and assumed a place beside him. They evidently supposed the attack to be of a very different character than it really was. The wounded horse was struggling and kicking, and I found time to think of the grave danger that its hoofs might injure Zara, whom I judged to be unconscious from fright, or because of the shock; and so, heedless of my own necessities in undertaking an assault upon the two men who now faced me, I fired a third bullet into the maddened animal. Then, as I sprang to the attack, I saw and recognized the man who confronted me, and my heart bounded with thanksgiving

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that I had taken that route to the palace. I recognized Alexis Durnief.

The report of his arrest had been false, or he had managed in some way to escape; and even then, in that instant of rushing onward upon the two men, I could not help wondering by what means he had managed to entice Zara from the house in which she had taken refuge. I had two bullets remaining in my revolver; at least I thought so, and I raised it, and pulled the trigger a fourth time, thus placing the *yemschik* effectually out of that combat, and rendering it impossible for him ever to engage in others; and then, when barely ten feet away from the scoundrelly captain, I leveled the weapon at him and ordered him to throw down his sword. He laughed derisively, for he was not a coward, and he knew that death would be far preferable to the fate that would be his, if he were captured alive.

"So! It is my friend Dubravnik, is it?" he said, insolently, but in a tone as cool as though he were greeting me in a ballroom. "You have killed my horses, and my *yemschik*; why not do the same for me?"

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I hesitated.

To shoot a man like that, was against every impulse of my soul; and yet he was armed with a weapon as deadly as mine, if once I should get within reach of its point. I possessed none with which to meet him on even ground. But, inside the *droshka*, was unquestionably the unconscious form of the woman I loved. The occasion was a crisis. There could be no temporizing. Zara must be rescued.

"Throw down your sword, or I will certainly kill you!" I commanded him, again.

"Kill," he replied, laconically. There was no other way, and I pulled the trigger.

There was no report. Durnief did not fall, as the horses, and his *yemschik* had done. He stood unharmed, for the cartridge was bad, or the chamber of my revolver was unloaded. Instantly he understood that he had me at his mercy, and with a deadly smile upon his face he leaped forward to run me through.

As he sprang towards me, I hurled the pistol with all my strength towards him. It struck him squarely

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in the breast, staggering him, and forcing him off his guard. Then, before he could recover, I sprang past the point of his weapon. I seized his sword arm, by the wrist, with my left hand, and threw my other arm around his body. We were as evenly matched as though we had trained at weights and measurements for the combat, and for a moment we struggled madly together, while I exerted all my strength to bend his wrist backward, so that he would be compelled to drop his sword.

It seems strange that such a struggle, taking place in the streets of a great city immediately following upon the four reports of my pistol, had not attracted attention and drawn somebody to the scene, but the passing night had been one of terror; policemen had been called away from their posts, and at that hour, just after dawn, when everything was quiet, nobody heard, or if they heard, feared to come. In using all my effort to compel him to drop his weapon I neglected the other necessary points of the struggle, and although I succeeded in my design, he forced me backwards at the same instant so that I fell beneath him, but I still had my right arm tightly

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clasped around him, and I hugged him to me with all the strength that I could master. With Durnief, it was a struggle for life, liberty, and everything that he possessed, and he fought with all the desperation of a madman. With me, it was life, and the woman I loved, and I fought coolly, knowing that he could not get away from me, believing that I could tire him out, and satisfied that I could prevent him from securing his sword again. He managed to wrench his hand from my grasp, and he struck me a savage blow on the head with his fist, but I threw the other arm around him then, and hugged him all the tighter, so that he was unable to repeat the blow.

It was a strange combat. A person ten feet away could not have heard it, for there was no sound save our heavy breathing. The snow deadened every noise that might have been made otherwise. The air was bitterly cold.

Presently I became conscious of the fact that my opponent was striving with all his might to force me in a certain direction, and I correctly conjectured that he had been able to discover the location of the sword and was making an attempt to reach it.

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So I bent my energies to avoiding his effort. My life had been largely one of adventure, and I had taken part in many combats, but never before in one like this where it was simply a matter of endurance, where neither party to the fray was suffering injury, and where the hope of success was so evenly divided. Odd as it may seem, while pinioning him thus so that he could not act on the offensive, I began to conjecture how long we might hold out, and the probability of assistance arriving to end it; and it was the uncertainty of the nature of that assistance that concerned me most.

I have said that there were not half a dozen confessed nihilists remaining at liberty in St. Petersburg, but there were hundreds, ay, thousands of nihilistic sympathizers, and there were hundreds of others who had become allied to the nihilists in some extrinsic way, who were in sympathy with the order, even if only passively so. If one or more of such were to happen along the assistance would surely be upon the side of my enemy, and certain defeat and death would be my portion. If a mere citizen were to interfere, the captain who still wore his uniform,

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would secure the proffered aid, not I. He would be believed, not I, and hence I understood that whatever advantage there might be in the way of interference, was on his side. Appreciating these facts, I exerted my strength to the utmost to turn the tide of battle in my favor, but I could accomplish nothing. He was as strong as I, though not more powerful, and so I relapsed again into the mere effort to hold him helpless, and to take the chances of wearing him out before assistance should come.

It seemed to me as though an hour passed thus; in reality, it may have been only a few moments, for minutes are long under such circumstances; and then there came an interruption — and a strange one.

"With whom are you struggling, Captain Durnief?" I heard a voice say.

"Zara!" I exclaimed, before Durnief could reply.

"With an assassin who has shot our horses, murdered the *yemschik*, and who would assassinate you, princess," panted Durnief.

"Zara!" I called to her again. "It is I — Dubravnik."

I heard her gasp, and although I could not see

THE COMBAT IN THE SNOW

her, I was conscious that she deliberately walked around us, probably to obtain a better view of me; and in that moment I think I doubted her; but I tightened my grip around the man I held, and waited grimly for events to shape themselves.

"Dubravnik?" she said, in a low tone, as if she were not convinced; but I did not speak again; and the captain also remained silent. Minutes, which seemed like hours, passed in another deathlike silence, broken only by the panting of Durnief. I wondered if Zara had fainted, or had gone for help, or what! There seemed to be no good reason for the silence, and the waiting. Why did she not grasp the sword, and send its point through one of us? It did not much matter to me, then, which one she might choose for its sheath.

Soon, however, I heard a sound directly above me — a sound which a stick might make in smiting the ground, and I felt that Durnief shuddered. In another instant it came again, and his arms relaxed, but only to tighten about me the more convulsively. Then a short pause, which was followed by the thudding sound of a blow heavier than its predecessors,

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and instantly following it, the tensioned muscles of Durnief relaxed. His arms fell from their clasp around me. I pushed him aside as though he were dead, and for a moment believed that he was; then springing upright, to my feet, I was just in time to catch the tottering form of my princess, who, though not unconscious, had spent her last remaining strength in that third blow. Her left hand held Durnief's sword. In her right was the *mujik's* whip, and I saw that she had used the stock of it to aid me.

"I stood for a long time, with the sword pressed against his back, where it would have pierced his heart," she murmured in my ear, while she clung to me. "I wanted to kill him, but I could not do it. Then I found the *yemschik's* whip, but I had not the strength to strike. Do you wonder why I left the house? The *yemschik* came to get me. He brought a note, signed by you. It said that my brother had been wounded, and was at my house; that it was safe for me to go there now. I hastened. I ran to the *droshka*, and sprang inside before I knew that it was occupied. Durnief was there. He seized me. Something was wrapped around my head, and

THE COMBAT IN THE SNOW

I lost consciousness, I think. Then I heard sounds, as if men were fighting, and I crawled from the overturned *droshka*, and saw you two struggling together, in the snow. I was dazed, frightened, and very weak. I did not remember what had happened; I did not recognize you. I thought, at first, that it was Durnief whom I should assist, and I stood there, watching the struggle for a long time, trying to remember. Then recollection came, for I heard your voice. It recalled to me my senses. I remembered who Dubravnik was. Is it not strange that I should have forgotten? Even for a moment, is it not strange that I should have forgotten?"

"No, dear, no," I replied.

"Then I found the sword, in the snow. I remembered that I wanted to kill Durnief, and I put the point against his back. But I could not press upon it. I tried, but I could not do it. It was horrible, Dubravnik, horrible. I tried a second time, and the point of the sword was actually piercing his clothing, when my eyes fell upon the whip. I secured it. There! See! He is reviving. Seize him, for he must not escape."

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT THE CZAR FORGOT

I TOOK Zara back to the house of the prince, where I was well known to every servant of the establishment, for I had been a constant and an honored guest, there. From it I despatched messengers to O'Malley, and to Coyle, and presently sent Durnief away to prison, in charge of the former, while the latter brought a conveyance which took Zara and me to the home of my princess. It was a much quicker return than I had anticipated, at the time we departed from that house together, but the condition in which we found it, told only too plainly what might have been my sweetheart's fate, had I trusted to appearances, and left her there. The nihilists had lost no time in searching for her, when they were made to believe that she had betrayed them. The place was almost a wreck. It had been searched, and the searchers had not hesi-

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tated to become despoilers, also. Nevertheless it was a happy homecoming for Zara, for looking upon the devastation that had been wrought in her absence, she turned to me with a smile, and said:

"I have lost much, this past night, Dubravnik, in shattered idols and broken toys, but I have gained the whole world, too, for I have found you."

When I had seen Zara safely inside her own door, and had given her every assurance of her entire safety, I had myself driven to the palace.

Although I had promised to see the emperor as soon as I arrived, I felt that it was my first duty to interview Prince Michael, in the hope that the events of the preceding day might be reviewed in a better spirit. Accordingly, I proceeded at once to his apartments, after the captain of the guard had assured me that his majesty was still sleeping, not having retired until nearly daylight. When I rapped upon the door of the room occupied by the prince, as a sleeping apartment, there was no response, and I repeated the summons, more loudly than before. Still I waited in vain, and at last, feeling some misgivings, and being assured by the guard in the cor-

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ridor that the prince had not left the room since he had gone to it the preceding evening, I turned the handle and entered.

I found him there. He was seated in a chair near one of the great windows through which the lately risen sun was shining full upon him; and the moment my eyes discovered him I started with horror, for I saw that he was dead. Instantly I stepped back through the door, and told the guard to call his captain, pointing out the lifeless form of the prince, and ordering him to tell nobody but his superior officer of the fact. Then I reëntered the room and approached the body of my former friend. There was a pistol beside him on the floor where it had fallen from his nerveless grasp after the fatal deed was performed, but he reclined as easily in the chair as though he had dropped asleep naturally, for a short nap instead of forever.

"Poor Michael!" I murmured. "Did I drive you to this? Would that I had not spoken."

I turned to glance around the room, professional instinct getting the best of me even in that moment of sorrow, and I quickly espied a letter upon the

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table. It was addressed to his majesty, the emperor, and was tightly sealed, so I placed it in my pocket and started to leave the room. At the door I met the captain of the guard with two of his men, and them I instructed to keep watch, but on no account to touch anything without his majesty's permission. Then I sought the czar.

"Well, Derrington?" he asked, as soon as I was admitted to his presence. "What of the night? Is the conspiracy crushed, and have you been successful?"

"Entirely so. Nihilism is effectually crushed for many years to come. My work in St. Petersburg is really done, I think. At least I can assure you that you will have no cause to fear the hand of an assassin for a long time; until this weed starts up anew."

"We are safe, then. Thank God for that."

"You are perfectly safe. The prisons are full to overflowing. I have sent many of the less guilty ones over the border with instructions not to return for many years to come. You will miss a few faces at court. You will be forced to fill a few vacancies in the army. The next caravan across Siberia will

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be a larger one than the last, and the population of this city will be depleted by nearly three thousand souls counting all that I have enumerated."

"This is glorious news to awaken to — glorious! I cannot repay you the debt I owe you, Derrington."

"Now that you have heard the good news, can you bear to hear some that is not so good, monsieur?"

"What! Is there bad news also?"

"Necessarily, there must have been some fatalities."

"Ah! Some one was killed? Some friend of mine?"

"Yes. Some one has killed himself."

"Durnief?"

"No. He is a prisoner."

"Why keep me waiting? Tell me at once."

"I greatly fear, your majesty, that I am responsible for this death. Here is the letter he left. Read it. I do not know what it contains. I only just now discovered the body."

"*Michael!*" He exclaimed as soon as he saw the handwriting. I made no reply and he broke the

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seal and read the last words of his lifelong friend. Presently he returned it to me.

"Read," he said, and I read.

My Friend,—

In death, qualities of rank cease, hence I address you as I have always felt towards you — as my friend. Derrington was right; he told the truth, and I lied. I am not now and have never been a nihilist in spirit, but it is true that I am one in fact. I joined them in a moment of folly, to protect a friend whom I knew to be one. I have never allied myself to them, and have never attended one meeting of theirs. The friend for whose sake I joined has been generous, and no demands have been made upon me; nevertheless, I am guilty. Yet, believe me my friend, when with my last breath I assure you that I have never harbored one disloyal thought towards you or yours, and I should unhesitatingly have betrayed the nihilists had I ever known of a single circumstance inimical to you. But I can live no longer under this disgrace, so I die. I beseech you let not the truth of my dishonor be known abroad. I was unjust to Der-

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rington, and I crave his pardon. I loved him as a brother, and as brothers quarrel at times, so did we. He is faithful; trust him. May God lead you in the right; may He preserve your life and your empire, and may He have mercy upon me.

MICHAEL.

Alexander was true to his friendship for Prince Michael. He mourned him sincerely, and nobody ever knew the true cause of the prince's death. The emperor respected that last wish of his dead friend. There was yet more mischief to be done, however, by that arch villain Durnief, for while we were still occupied with the care of Prince Michael's remains, the czar sent for me in haste.

"This is a day of surprising missives," he said. "Here is another letter for you to read." I took it in my hand and glanced at the signature.

"Durnief," I said, with a sneer. "Why should I read it? The man cannot tell the truth."

"Because I desire you to do so."

The note began in the usual form of addresses to the emperor, and was as follows:

WHAT THE CZAR FORGOT

You have ere this been informed, and supplied with ample proof, that I am among the ranks of your enemies, the nihilists. I confess it, but I became one of them for selfish motives, not for political ones. Never mind that. It is not my intention to intercede for mercy, for I know that your heart is a stranger to that quality. It is to tell you a truth that you should know. It is to tell you that the one most dangerous of all nihilists, is to go free; is to remain in Russia; is to have access to your palace; is spared by your trusted spy, Dubravnik; is upheld by him. This nihilist to whom I refer, has been, ever since the death of my one time rival, Stanislaus, the most dangerous of all the extremists. This nihilist leader is a woman, and her name is Zara de Echeveria. Dubravnik will spare her; he will spare her brother who is as violent as she is.

One last word. I will never go to Siberia for I have the means to cheat you out of the pleasure of sending me there, and when you read this, I shall have been an hour dead.

ALEXIS DURNIEF.

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"Well," demanded his majesty, "what have you to say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing!"

"No."

"Have you arrested her?"

"I have not."

"Where is she now?"

"In her own home. I took her there this morning. Listen for a moment, and I will tell you how that occurred."

Then I related in detail the story of my struggle with Durnief, the rescue of Zara, her heroism in assisting me, and I told of the final capture and imprisonment of the captain. But his majesty shook his head in a doubt.

"I believe Durnief's letter. She is a nihilist," he said. "She must be arrested." I shook my head, but he did not see the motion and continued: "I believe that the princess is the friend to whom poor Michael referred. He was in love with her and nothing short of the love of a woman could have made him disloyal to me. Yes, I believe that she is

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what Durnief says she is. I order you to place her under arrest at once."

"She shall not be arrested," I said, coldly.

"What!" he cried, "you *dare* to disobey me?"

"Yes," I replied, "I dare to disobey such an order as that. It shall not be."

"Are you a traitor, also? Was Michael right?"

There was that sneering smile upon his face now, but I held my ground.

"I am not a traitor, but I will not carry out your request, and I will not permit it to be carried out." He was aghast at my effrontery. He could only gaze at me in amazement, too greatly confounded for speech; and I continued: "Listen to me one moment, your majesty."

"I will not listen to you. The road to Siberia may be traveled by you as well as by the friends whom you apprehended last night, and by heaven, you shall follow it!"

"You forget one thing," I said. "You have forgotten —"

"What have I forgotten?"

"The Fraternity of Silence."

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"Bah!"

"I foresaw this moment, your majesty, and my men have their orders to meet it. If I am molested, every nihilist who was arrested last night — every one who was in prison in the city before that time — will be liberated in an hour, and you have not soldiers nor policemen enough to stop the tide that will flow against you then. Your empire will crumble like dust, and your life will go out like the snuffing of a candle. For the present, I am the Czar of Russia, and you are only Alexander Alexandrovitch." He sat still and looked at me with staring eyes. "You are only a man, after all, monsieur," I continued more softly. "In your fears for the safety of your family, for your empire, and for yourself, you are led to do unjust things. Only an hour ago you said that you owed me a debt that you could never repay. You do owe me a debt, and you can repay it if you will forget for a moment that you are a monarch, and remember that you are a man. You can repay all you owe me, and more, if you will still be my friend, and forget that this scene has occurred; and when you have done that, I will tell you that

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Zara de Echeveria is to be the wife of Daniel Derrington; is to leave Russia forever with her husband, and were she the worst nihilist in the empire — and I know that she is not — she will be far away from any temptation to do you harm, and under the guidance of one who has proven his devotion to you. I will tell you more: I will leave the direction of the affairs of the fraternity in the hands of one of my men who is as expert as I am, and who is in every way as worthy of your confidences as I have proven myself to be — Canfield."

The czar rose unsteadily to his feet and came towards me with his right hand extended.

"Derrington," he said, slowly, "I have been unjust. If I had other friends like you, who dared to tell me the truth as it is, and not distort it out of all recognition — if there were others here who dared to defy me when defiance alone will make me see things in their right light, Russia would be the better for it. Go to Zara d'Echeveria. Tell her that I wish her to come here. Tell her that the Czar of Russia will ask her forgiveness for an act that he could not avoid committing. She will understand.

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You shall be married in the palace, and you will both remain in Russia."

Then he put his arms around me in Russian fashion and bade me go.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SABEREVSKI'S PROPHECY

ALL this time I had forgotten Ivan, whom I had left, bound and helpless, at my rooms, and who, I knew, must be suffering untold tortures of doubt and dread, concerning the happenings of the night. So now I hastened to him with all speed. Poor chap, he was nearly done for by the strained position he had been compelled to maintain for so long a time, but I have always believed that it did him good, and that without it he might have been less tractable, when the time came for a reconciliation with his sister. It gave him an opportunity for the right sort of meditation, which, perhaps, he had never enjoyed before. Every time the temptation came to him to break his bonds and make his escape, he remembered that he must remain where he was, for the sake of the sister he loved so well, whose

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life would be forfeited so easily, if he should carry to his nihilistic friends the knowledge he possessed. I found him weak, and worn, but still firm in the determination to await my coming. I unbound him, gave him food and wine and as soon as he was sufficiently recovered ordered my droshka and took him to Zara's house.

I made him wait until I had gone to her, and told her of my last interview with the emperor, and I succeeded in securing her reluctant consent to go to the palace with me that day. Then I called to Ivan, and when I saw the brother and sister clasped in each other's arms, I left them alone together. What passed between them, I have never been told, and I never thought it necessary to ask. I only know that when I was presently called into the consultation, Ivan offered me his hand, tenderly, and I grasped it, warmly.

"You are to be my brother," he said; "and Zara tells me that you two are going to America, to live. May I go with you, Dubravnik? Will you take me, also, out of this hell of plotting and scheming, and this chaos of exile and death? Will you make an

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American of me, and let me be your brother, indeed?"

After that, we three passed a very happy hour together, after which I hurried away, with the assurance that Zara would accompany me into the presence of the czar, that evening. I had not told her of the death of Prince Michael, for the knowledge of it, and why he had killed himself, could only cast a shadow over the great joy she was now experiencing; afterward, there would be a time and place for the telling, and I did not want the knowledge of it to come upon her with a shock, just now.

Weeks afterward, when we were on the deck of the steamer that was taking us to my own country, as we stood together, overlooking a moonlit sea, she reached up, and with one of her soft, fair hands, turned my face towards hers with a gesture that was characteristic; and I loved it.

"Dubravnik," she said — she still insists that she will always address me so, because it is the name by which she first knew me — "I do not know myself, any more. I am not the same woman who was once so vengeful. Love has taught me how to for-

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give. Love has made me over again. I am no longer the same Zara."

"No," I said lightly, "for now you are Zara Derrington."

"Tell me," she asked, after another interval of gazing across the waters, "shall we see Alexis Saberevski, over there, where your home is?"

I did not answer the question, for upon the instant she mentioned the name of my friend, it recalled to me the circumstance of my last parting with him. I remembered the sealed envelope he had given me, and the instructions that came with it. I had forgotten it entirely, until that moment; but now, without replying to her question, I drew the missive from my pocket and broke the seal.

What I read there seems wonderfully prophetic to me, even now, and I read it over a second time, in my amazement. Then I gave it to Zara.

"Read," I said, "for there is the answer to your question."

And this is the letter Zara read aloud to me, while we two leaned against the rail of the vessel that was bearing us to our home across the sea. The man in

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the moon was looking down, and smiling upon our happiness, and shedding sufficient light for my sweetheart-wife to see Saberevski's written words. They were:—

Derrington, these written words are to make you and Zara de Echeveria known to each other. Months will pass, and many of them may do so, before you will read what is written here; and it may be, it likely will be, that you are standing side by side when you break the seal of the last communication, written or oral, which I shall probably ever submit to you. For our paths, henceforth, will lead us widely apart, Derrington. You are a free agent, the arbiter of your own destiny; I am one who can take no initiative regarding the paths I must tread. But this letter is not to speak of myself, but is to tell you about her, if, perchance, when you read these words, you have never met.

Yesterday, when a ship sailed away from its pier in the North River, you accompanied me to the dock, amazed that I should ask you to do so, and doubtless wondering all the while why I made no effort to

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see, or to speak with any person, there. But when the ship had swung into the stream, you saw me wave my hand in farewell to some person among those who thronged her decks. That person was Zara de Echeveria, the princess to whose presence in New York you lately called my attention, but respecting which I was already informed; for at the moment of your communication I had already seen her, and talked with her, and we had parted as you and I will do when I place this letter in your hands — forever.

You are going upon a mission, Derrington, although it may be that you have not decided in your own mind to do so; but the decision is there, awaiting your recognition of it. Your mission will take you to Russia, to accomplish the great work I have suggested to you. I have willed it that you must go, and go you will. You will serve the czar as faithfully as I have done; but better, because you are not a Russian, and you have not the inborn awe of title and rank.

And you will have been successful in that mission when you have read these written words, for I shall

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instruct you not to break the seal until you are ready to take your departure from that country, which you will never do without having attained success. You are to serve the czar, and for him and in his name, will achieve the disruption of the nihilist societies of St. Petersburg, and therefore of the empire. I know your thoroughness, and I anticipate that very many among the prominent revolutionists will soon be known to you. Among them you will find the name I have written here — Zara de Echeveria.

I present her to you, Derrington, by this letter, as if we three were standing together in the form of formal introduction. I am a fatalist, and I know that you two will meet, and read your destinies in each other's souls. If you are already together, there will be no need of this letter, save to tell you how thoroughly and how well I love you both. God has written your futures on the same page of the book of destiny, and I have read the writing. You are created for one another, and as surely as God's love watches over us all, just so surely has He put the seal of enduring human love upon you both. Why it will be so, and how it will come about, I have not

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the skill to tell, but my prophetic vision looked into the futures of you both, when I talked with you, one after another, yesterday; and I saw you passing down the declining years of life, hand in hand, and heart with heart, like one.

If Zara be not with you, seek her.

The name will be familiar to you, by reason of your late employment, even though she may have escaped your personal recognition till now. Therefore, I repeat, if Zara be not with you now, turn about and seek her. I charge you so.

But something tells me that you will be together, standing side by side, happier in the great love that has come to you both, than all your dreams have ever promised. Therefore, I bless you and may the good God who made you for each other, hold you in his keeping always.

SABEREVSKI.

Zara and I were both strangely silent after the reading of the letter, but I took her quietly in my arms, and she pillowed her head against my shoulder while we looked out across the moonlit sea, prais-

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ing God, and insensibly calling down blessings upon the name of our good friend.

"Saberevski knew me to be a nihilist, and warned me against it that day," she said to me.

"He was the dearest friend I ever had," I replied; and she murmured:

"He was a good man."

Who can tell how Alexis Saberevski could have foreseen this meeting of the ways, between Zara and me? What was it that directed his prophetic vision across the mystery of many months, to discover us two, standing side by side, when we perused his letter? What was it that told him that we would love and wed?

Many years have passed since that night on the steamship's deck, and we have never seen nor heard from Saberevski since.

He was a mystery to me when I knew him; he remains a mystery still.

But the greatest mystery of all is love.

THE END